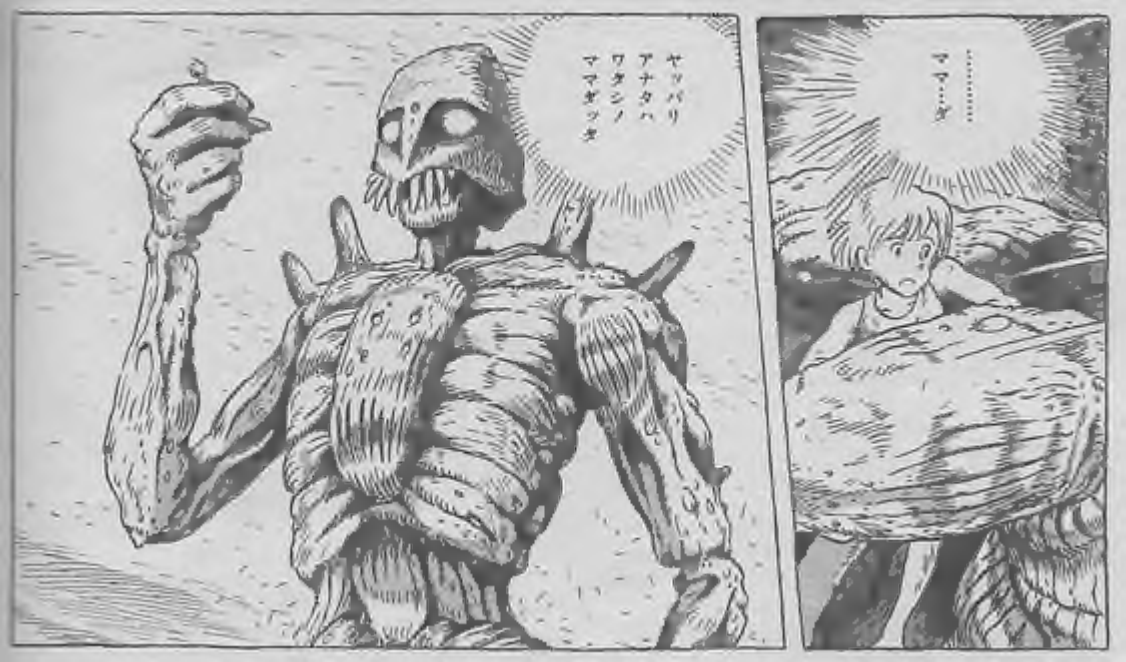
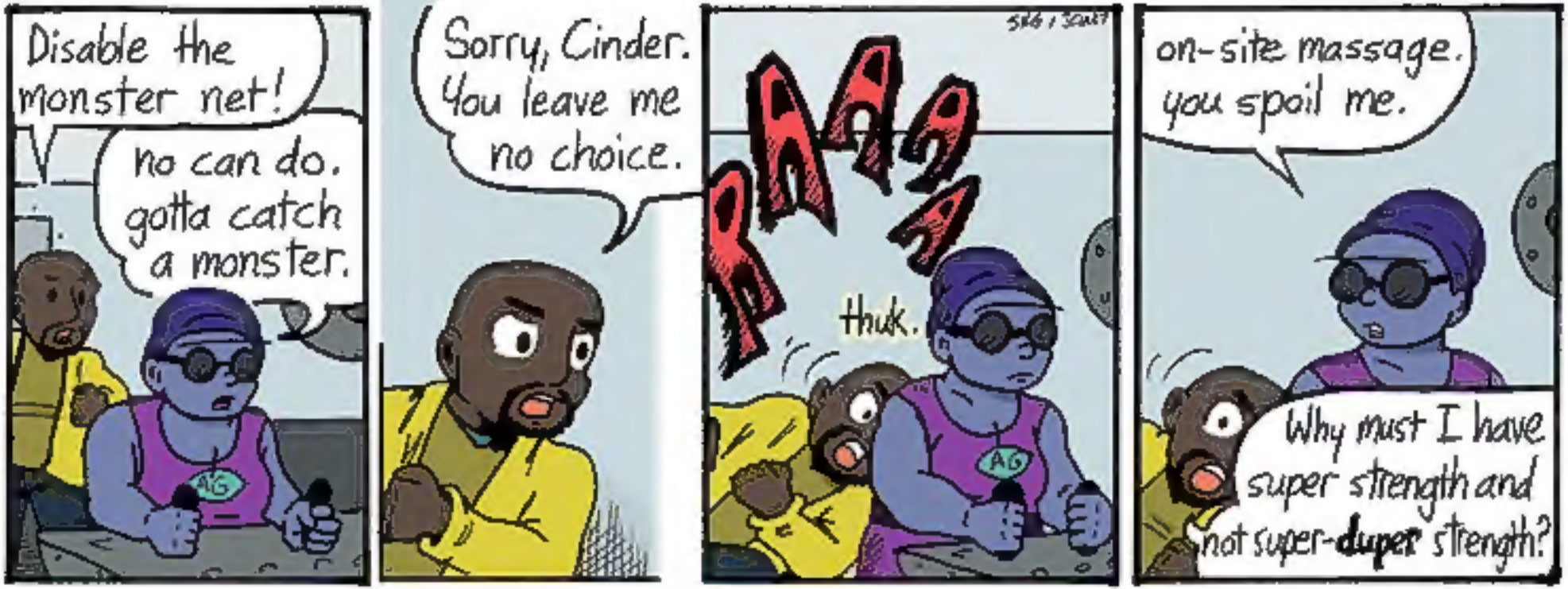
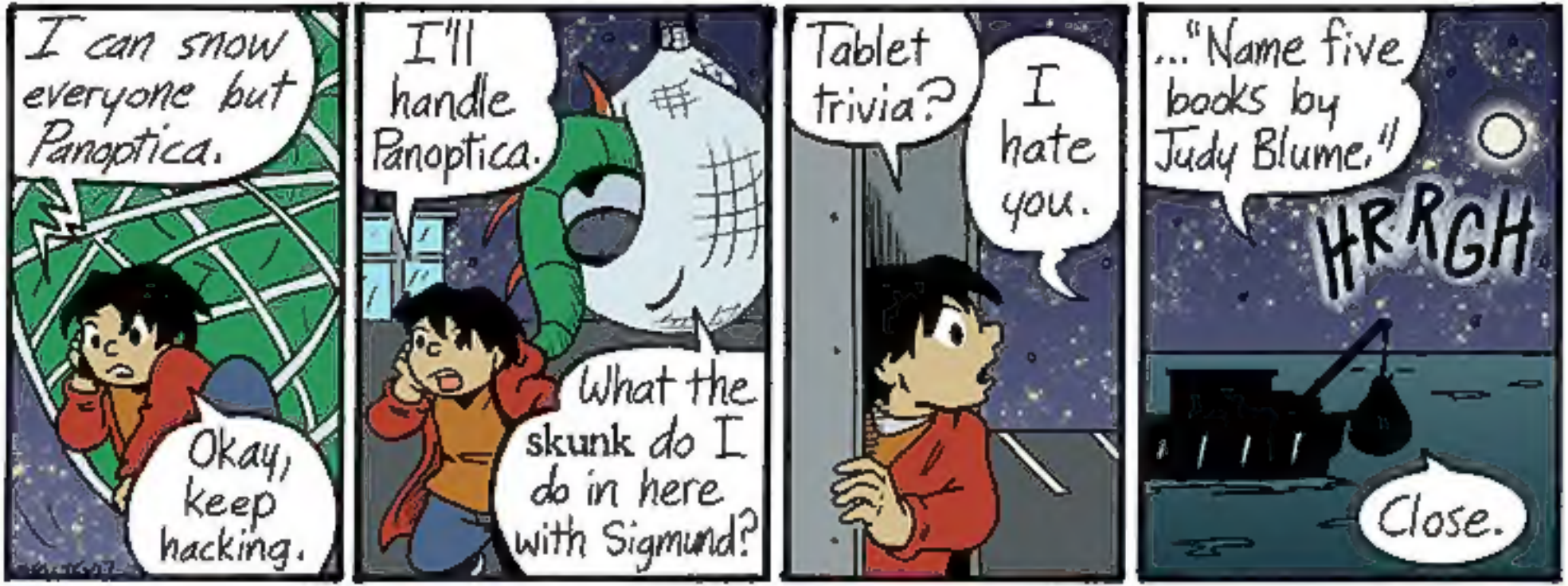

ヤッパリ
アナタハ
ワタシノ
ママギッチ
……
ママ…ガ

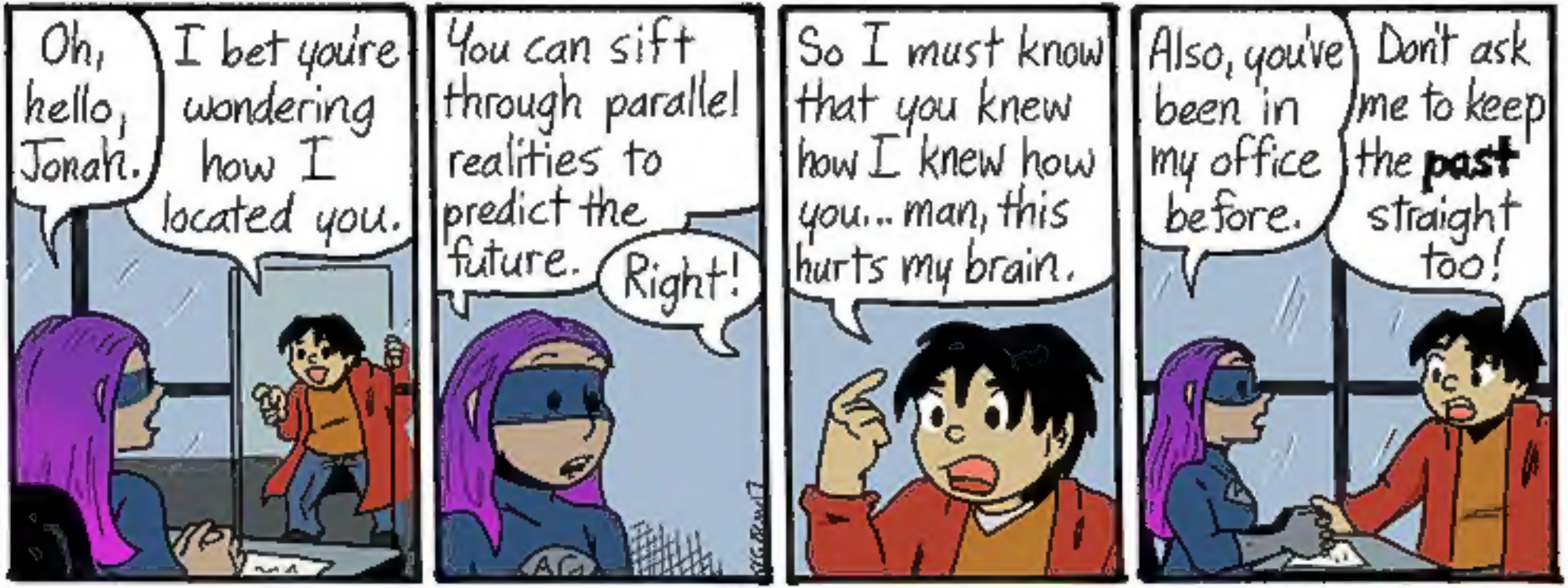
Today Jimmy and his parents are on an exciting trip to Anasigma Central! Hello, Jimmy!
Oh, boy! Jimmy can't wait to learn all about his favorite top-secret paranational shadow government brain trust!
Unfortunately, Jimmy fails a basic background check and wiretap and has to be disappeared.
Some of these aren't all that helpful.
Destroying small children is one of the things Anasigma does best!


Disable the monster net!
no can do. gotta catch a monster.
Sorry, Cinder. You leave me no choice.
RAGA
thuk.
on-site massage. you spoil me.
Why must I have super strength and not super-duper strength?

Ha ha! This is like attacking the Death Star!
Only wet.
Also no lasers or cool music.
Huh.
SPLOOSH
YOINK
HRRRGH
Ends crunching differently, too.
Yeah, this is some Ewok thing.

Jonah! What's your status?
Oh, just hanging around in a giant net!
Wait, that's not a good quip.
I'm going to feed AG-I new orders through their computer.
I'll order them to let Rhodey go.
You really think you can fool those goons?
THE MYSTERY VOICES ARE DISSING ME AGAIN!
AGI
Pretty sure.


I can snow everyone but Panoptica.
Okay, keep hacking.
I'll handle Panoptica.
What the skunk do I do in here with Sigmund?
Tablet trivia?
I hate you.
..."Name five books by Judy Blume."
HRRGH
Close.


Oh, hello, Jonah.
I bet you're wondering how I located you.
You can sift through parallel realities to predict the future.
Right!
So I must know that you knew how I knew how you... man, this hurts my brain.
Also, you've been in my office before.
Don't ask me to keep the past straight too!

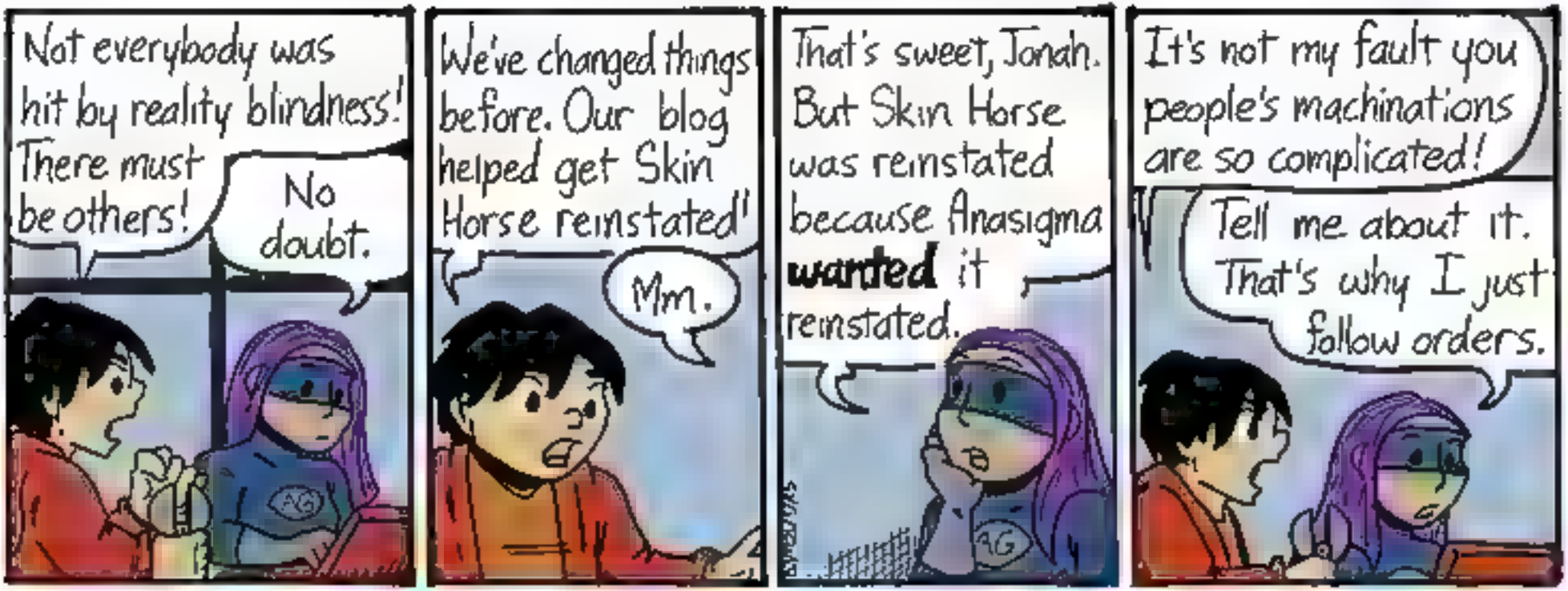
HA! I foresaw your panic button and had my hacker friend disable it!
I read your mind and fixed it.
I foresaw you reading my mind, so I had her seal the door too!
I also sensed that.
One of my super-powered colleagues will be here shortly to smash the door.
I have a wrench!
I have a gun, but you don't see me waving it around.

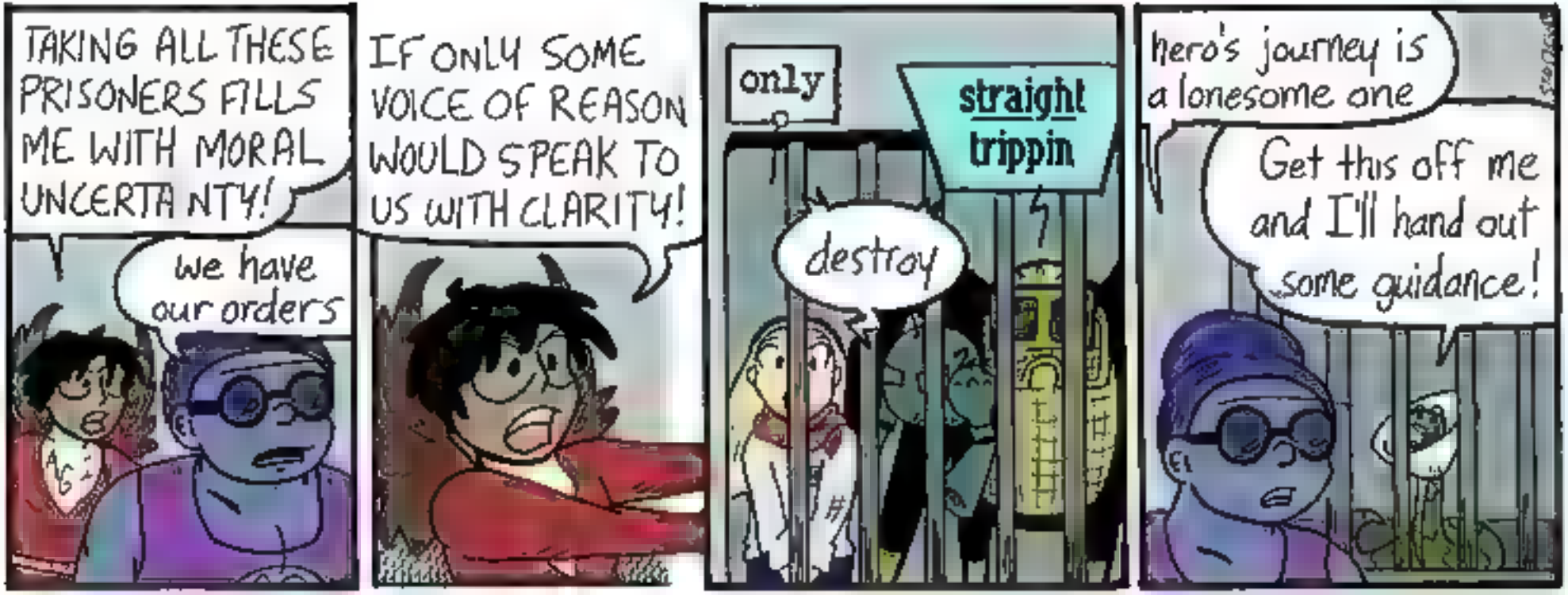
January 3

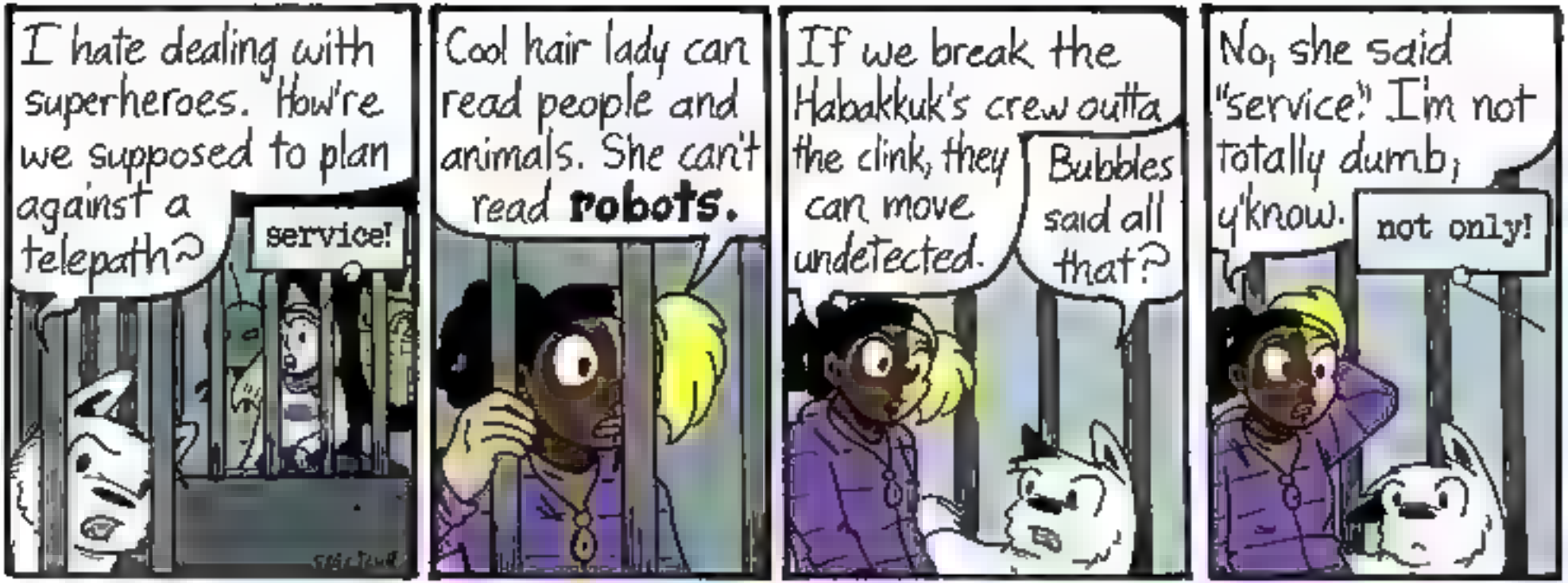
According to the Internet, today is Memento Mori Day, when the living should reflect on the inevitability of death. A lot of horror movies could serve that purpose, but few take "in the midst of life we are in death" as literally as the deeply weird horror comedy CEMETERY MAN (1994). Rupert Everett is Francesco Dellamorte, the caretaker at an Italian cemetery where corpses keep rising from the dead. Dellamorte is kept busy enough re-killing people every night, but the movie keeps piling on bizarre tangents until the zombie fighting is almost a minor plot point. It all makes exactly as much sense as a movie based on an Italian comic book should.

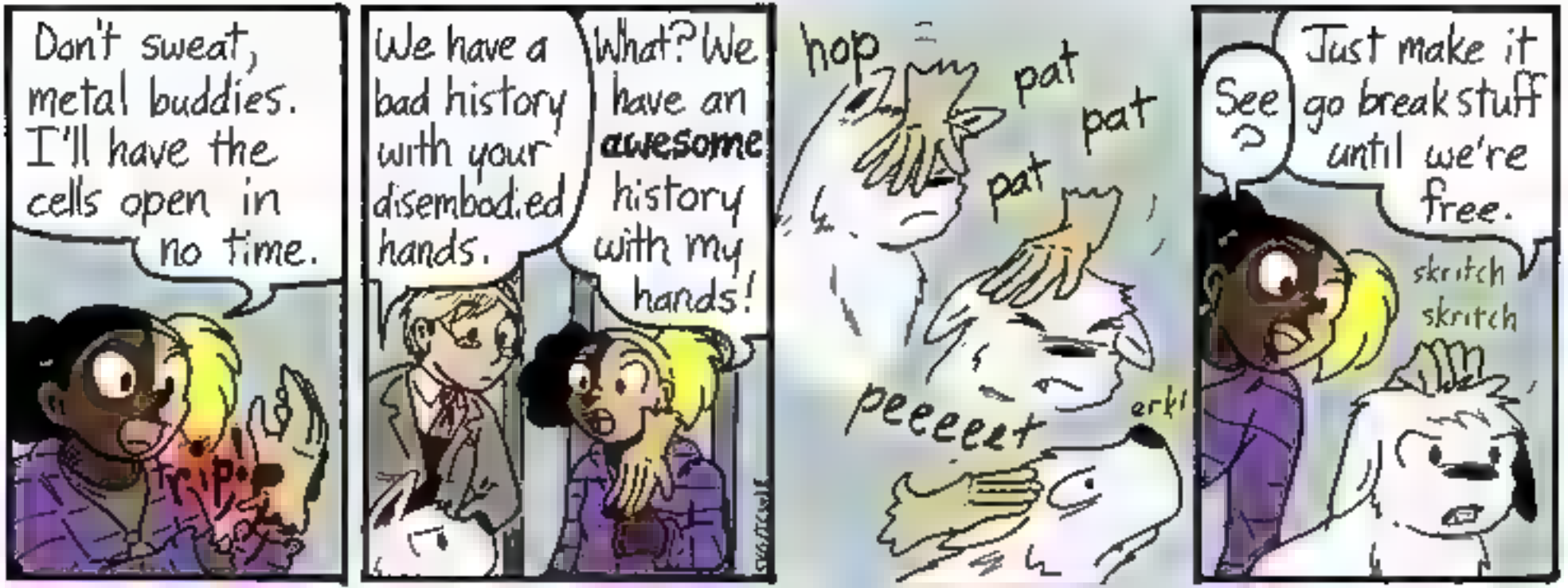
CW: rape jokes, castration jokes, mental disability jokes, blithely murdered sex workers, making you think about zombie sex

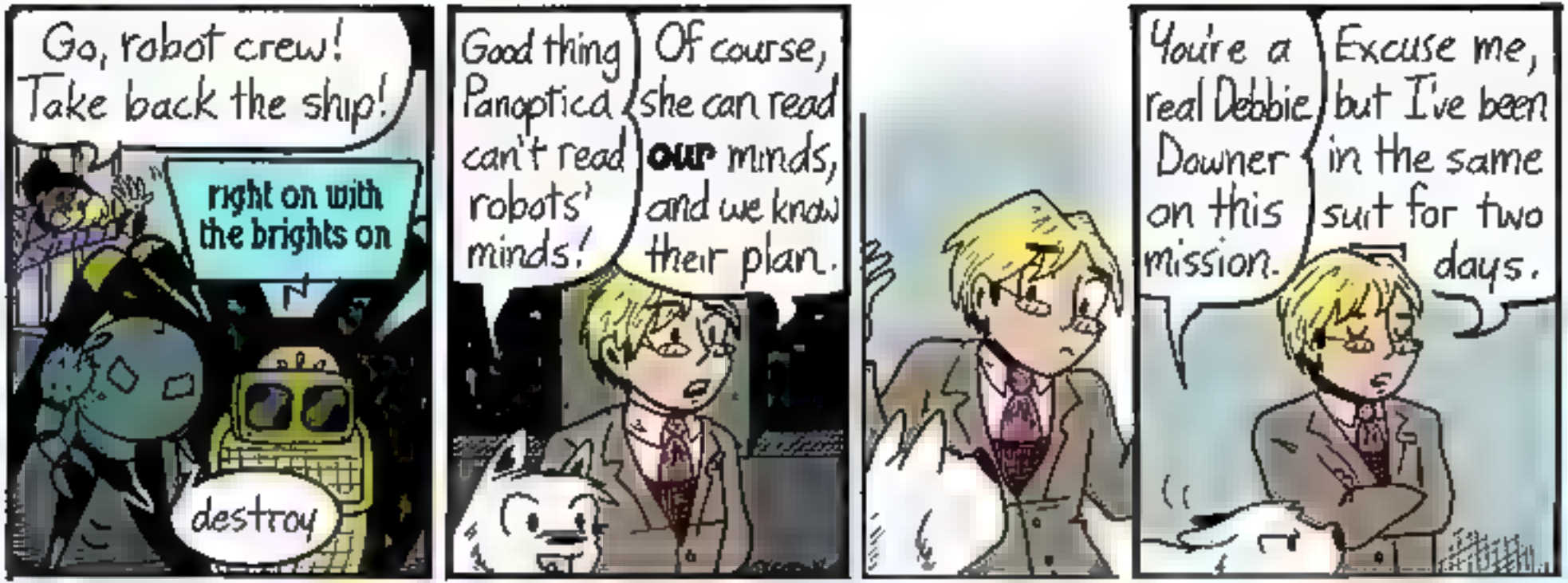
This is how we go forward from here. Our current detainees will remain in custody.
We'll handle this internally. You and your girlfriend are free to go.
We'll publish an exposé!
Which, in the new reality-blind America, no one will read.
I need less insightful foes.
Wait, not quite true. I'm subscribing.

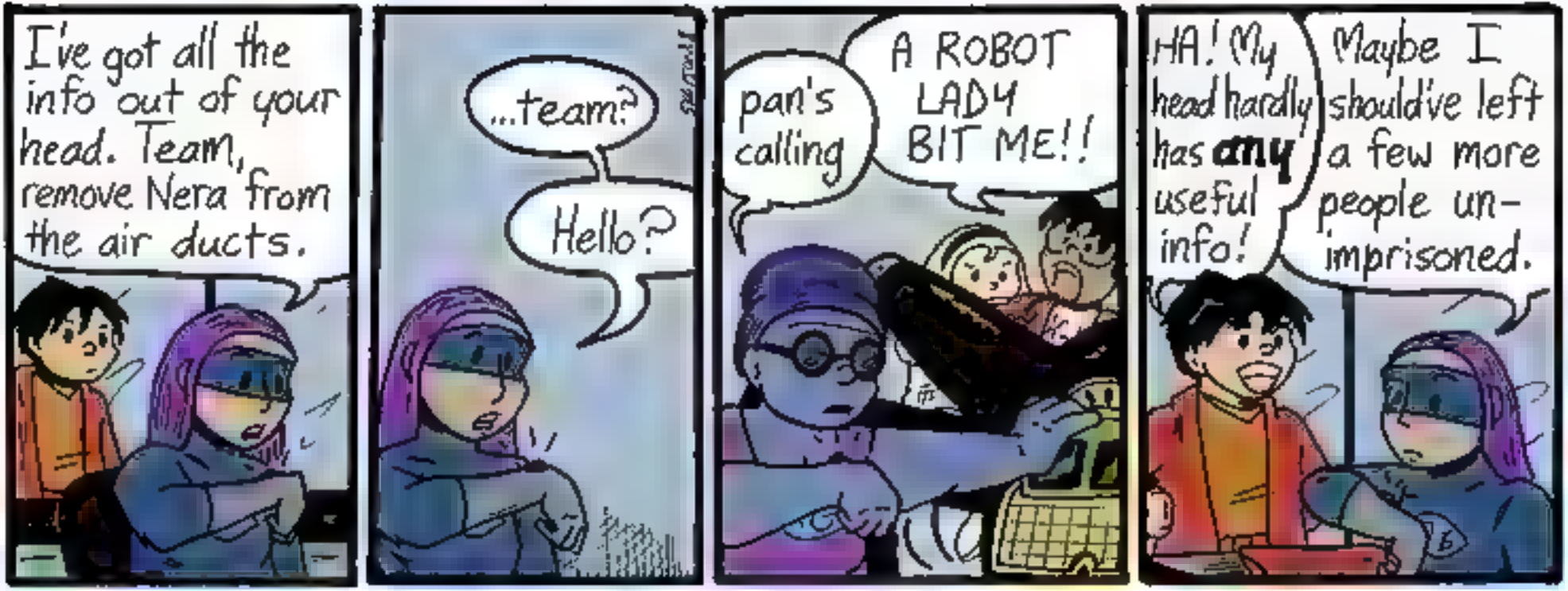

Not everybody was hit by reality blindness! There must be others!
No doubt.
We've changed things before. Our blog helped get Skin Horse reinstated!
Mm.
That's sweet, Jonah. But Skin Horse was reinstated because Anasigma **wanted** it reinstated.
It's not my fault you people's machinations are so complicated!
Tell me about it. That's why I just follow orders.

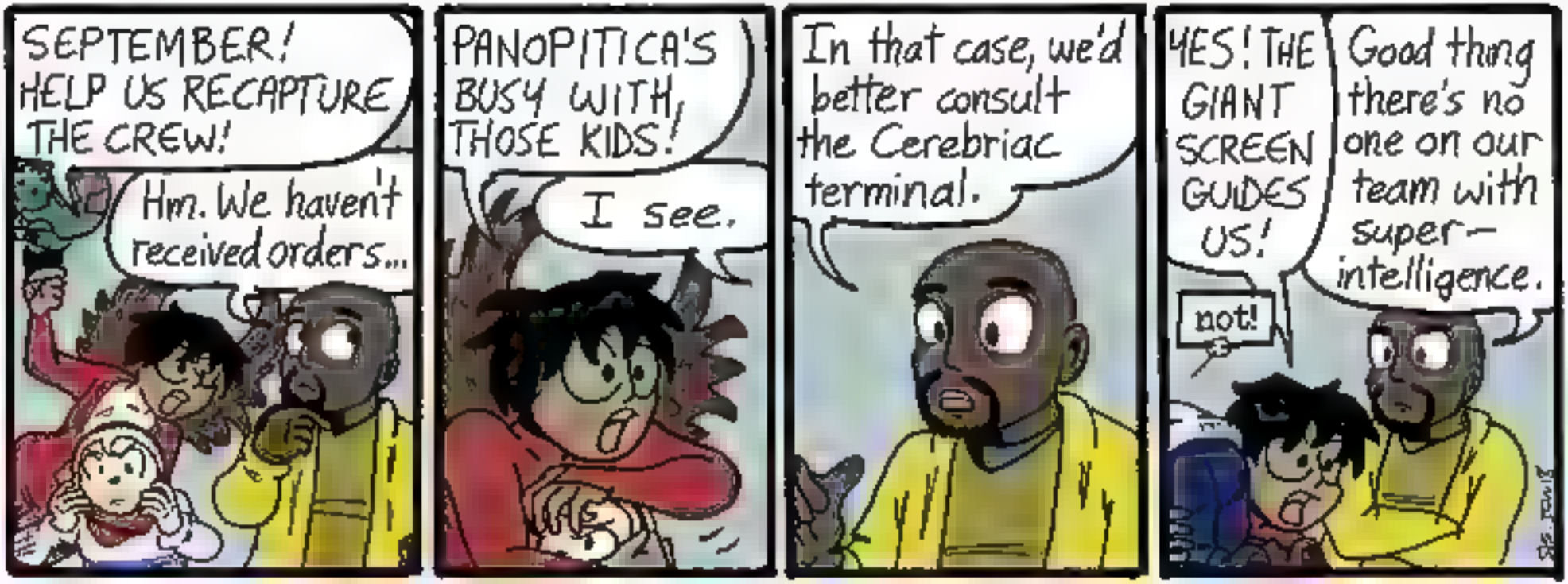

TAKING ALL THESE PRISONERS FILLS ME WITH MORAL UNCERTAINTY!
we have our orders
IF ONLY SOME VOICE OF REASON WOULD SPEAK TO US WITH CLARITY!
only
straight trippin
destroy
hero's journey is a lonesome one
Get this off me and I'll hand out some guidance!

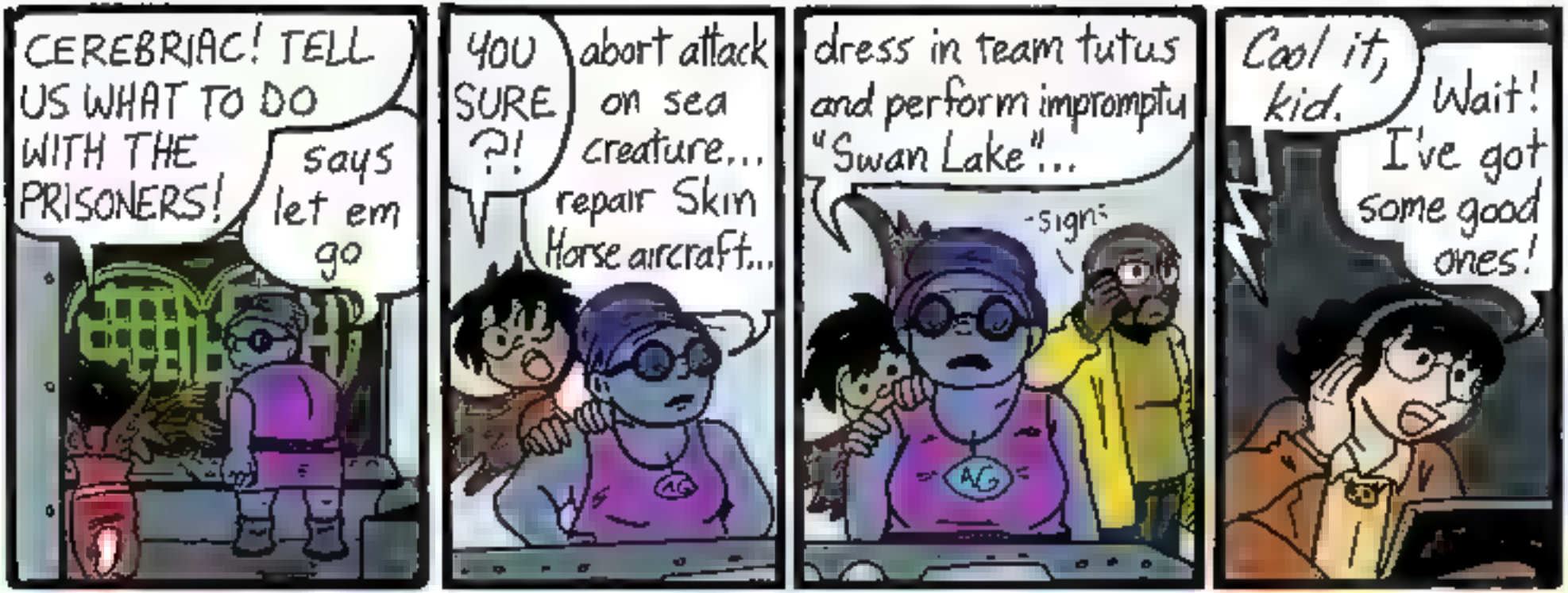

I hate dealing with superheroes. How're we supposed to plan against a telepath?
service!
Cool hair lady can read people and animals. She can't read robots.
If we break the Habakkuk's crew outta the clink, they can move undetected.
Bubbles said all that?
No, she said "service." I'm not totally dumb, y'know.
not only!


Don't sweat, metal buddies. I'll have the cells open in no time.
TRIP!
We have a bad history with your disembodied hands.
What? We have an awesome history with my hands!
hop
pat
pat
pat
peeeeet
erk!
See?
Just make it go break stuff until we're free.
skritch
skritch


Go, robot crew! Take back the ship!
right on with the brights on
destroy
Good thing Panoptica can't read robots' minds!
Of course, she can read OUR minds, and we know their plan.
You're a real Debbie Downer on this mission.
Excuse me, but I've been in the same suit for two days.


I've got all the info out of your head. Team, remove Nera from the air ducts.
...team?
Hello?
pan's calling
A ROBOT LADY BIT ME!!
HA! My head hardly has any useful info!
Maybe I should've left a few more people un-imprisoned.

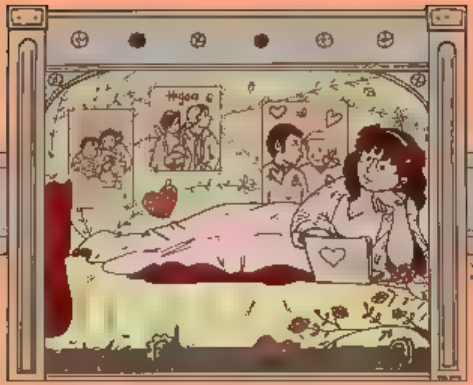

SEPTEMBER! HELP US RECAPTURE THE CREW!
Hm. We haven't received orders...
PANOPITICA'S BUSY WITH THOSE KIDS!
I see.
In that case, we'd better consult the Cerebriac terminal.
YES! THE GIANT SCREEN GUIDES US!
not!
Good thing there's no one on our team with super-intelligence.


CEREBRIAC! TELL US WHAT TO DO WITH THE PRISONERS!
says let em go
YOU SURE?!
abort attack on sea creature... repair Skin Horse aircraft...
dress in team tutus and perform impromptu "Swan Lake"...
-sigh-
Cool it, kid.
Wait! I've got some good ones!

C'mon, ma'am. You have to give up.
Oh?
It's superhero rules! When you meet a rival team, you fight until you realize you're on the same side!
Then we all team up against a common foe—
klik
Okay, that's completely against superhero rules.
So is taking hostages, but here we are.

To me, AG-I! We have to rally against the—
What are you doing?
building a balsa wood model of the seaplane from "TaleSpin"
CEREBRIAC'S ORDERS!
Reading your minds to find out what happened is going to give me a splitting headache.
Nera **really** loves the Disney Afternoon.

Panoptica!
What are you doing?
Reminding you who has the power.
It's in this boy's mind. Whatever you do, all you have are a few misfits and... a sea.. monster...
Cripes.
How did you avoid thinking about the sea monster?
It was hard to think of anything but the gun, ma'am.

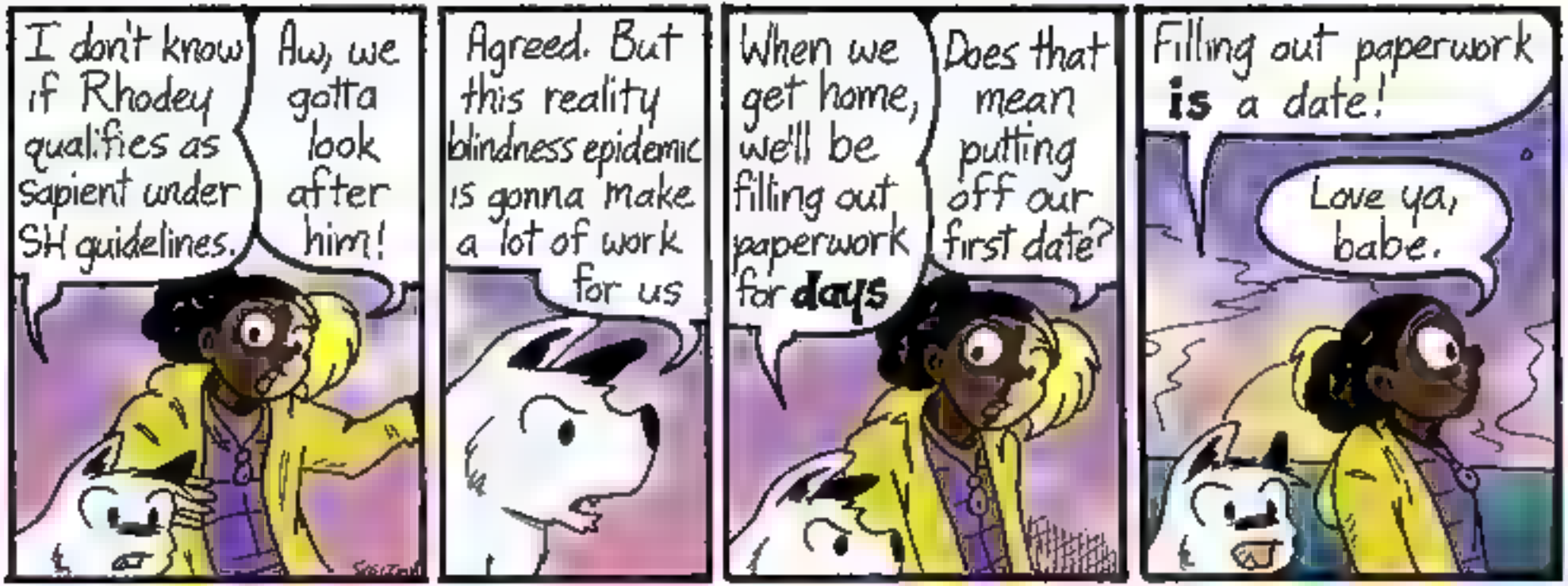

Hugs

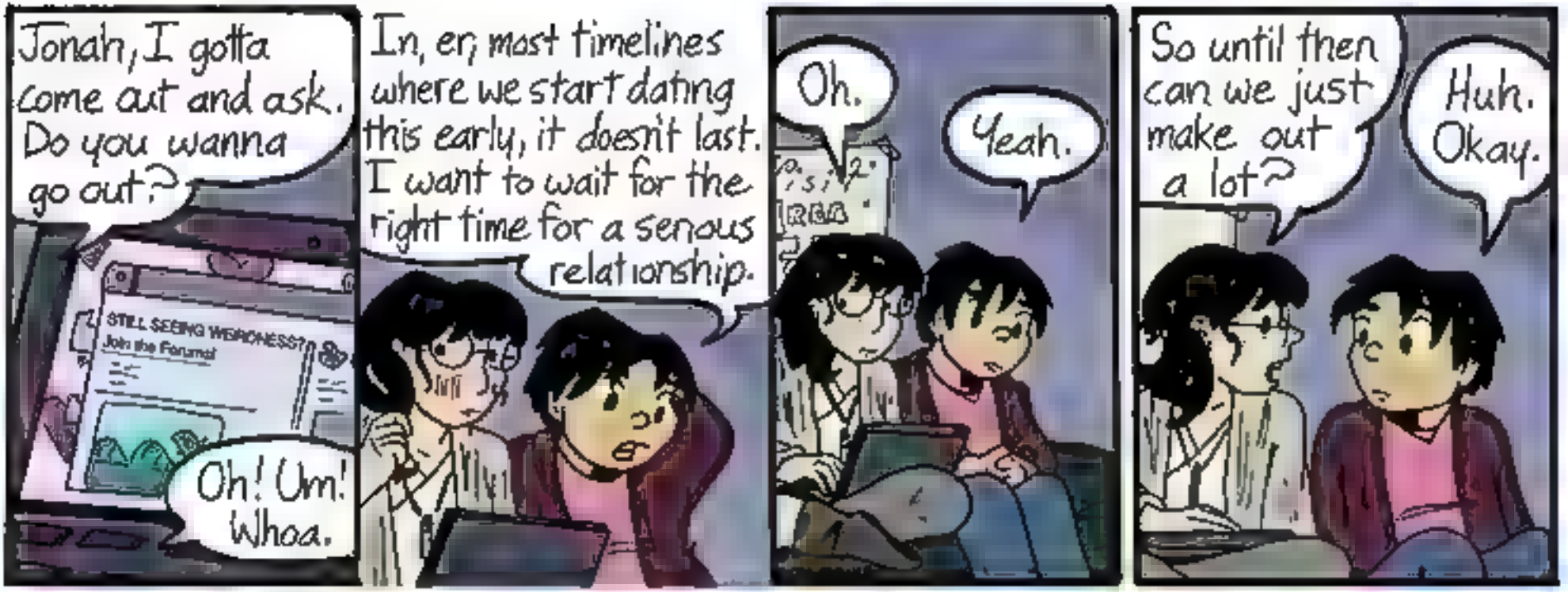
I knew you came to my office as a distraction. That's when I launched my counteroffensive.
I stalled you to pick your brain, aware of the unique opportunity to read a precog...
...and... I got distracted.
That'll teach you to overestimate me!
It's a mistake I won't make again.

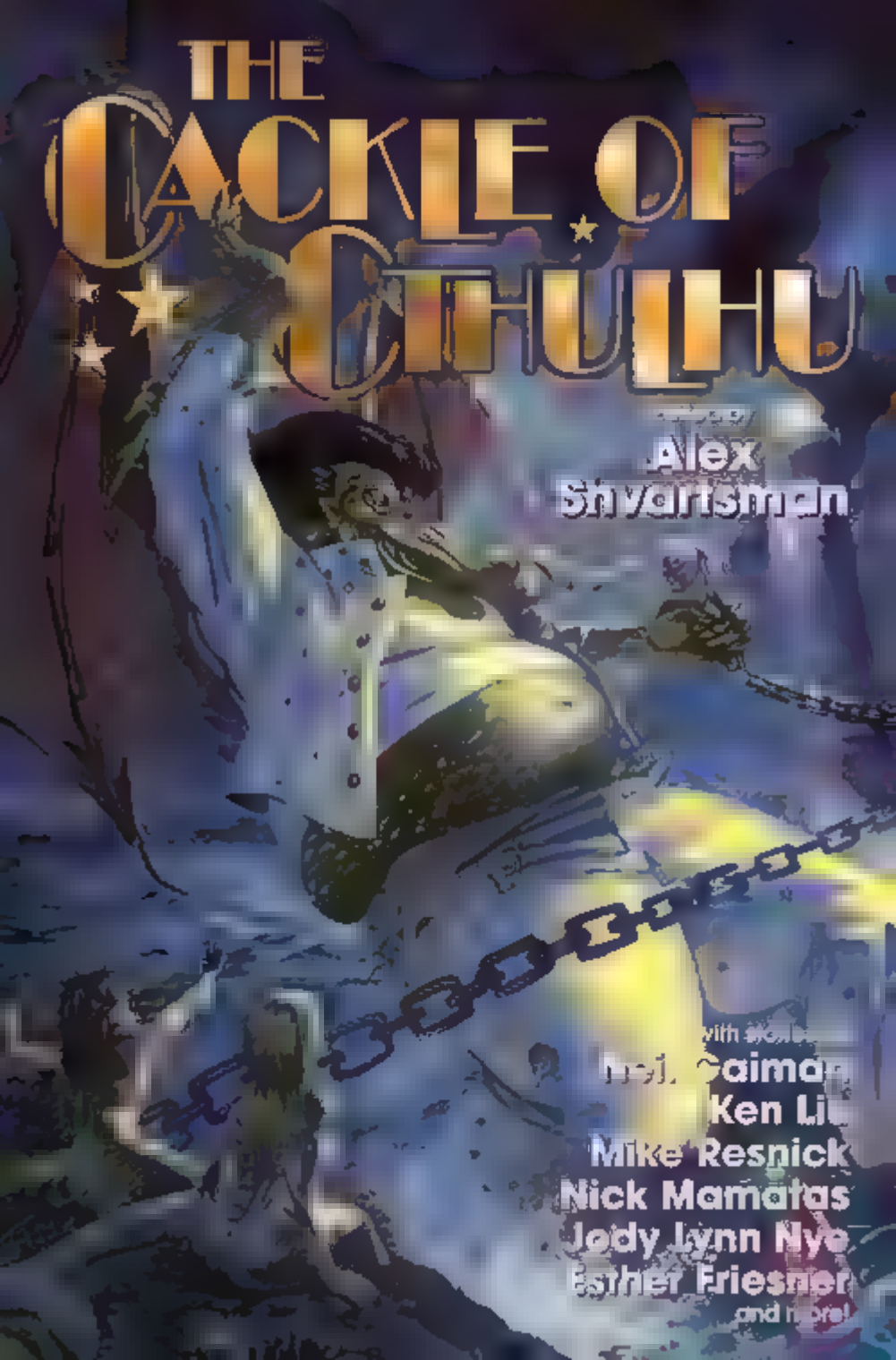
PANOPTICA! IN LIGHT OF RECENT EVENTS, WE ARE RE-EVALUATING THE DIRECTION OF OUR SUPER-TEAM!
WE REQUEST YOU STEP DOWN FOR AN INDEFINITE LEAVE OF ABSENCE WHILE AG-I RESTRUCTURES!!
AGI
WE ALSO INTEND TO EXAMINE OUR INTEL FOR POTENTIALLY COMPROMISED SOURCES!!!!
AGI
i gave her notes
I figured.
OFF TO FIND BREADCRUMBS!

team needs a new leader, September
I'm out.
While I was tracking Anasigma, they infiltrated my own organization. I don't belong on a team.
I'll go back to what I know.. patrolling the streets, setting things right one civilian at a time...
you had a taco truck
I think I was doing more good then.

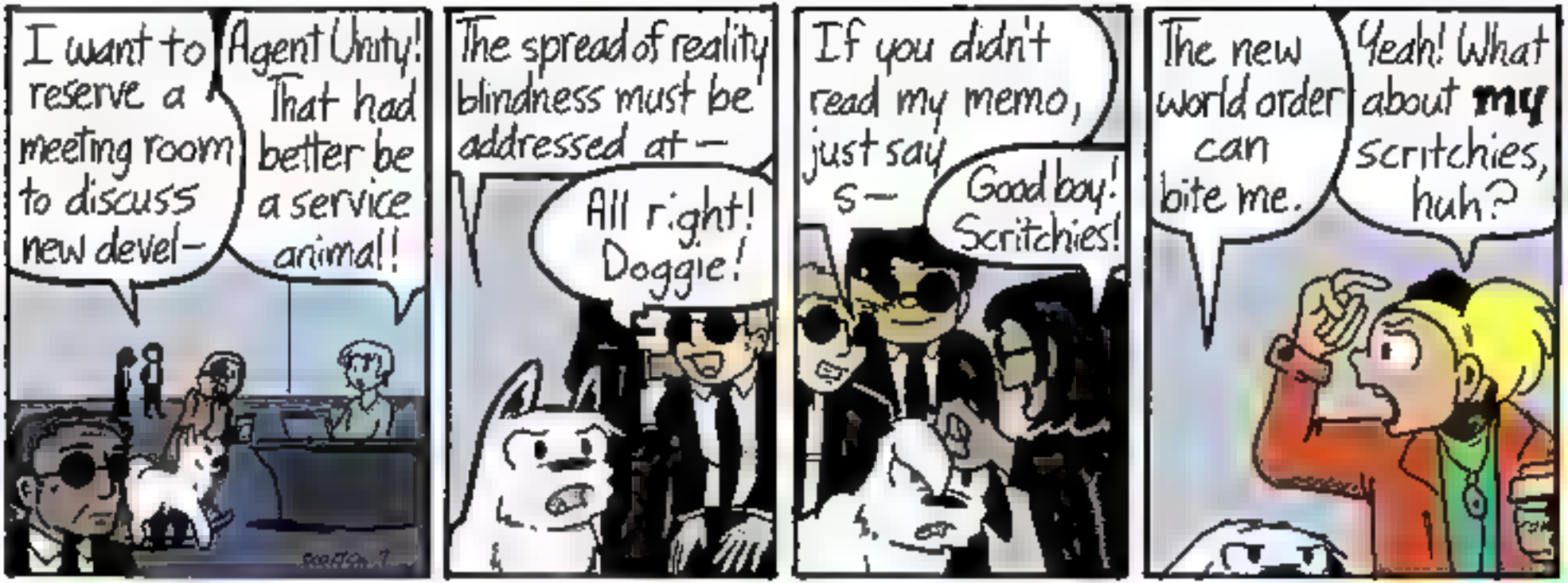
Thanks, Rhodey. We'll make sure nobody tries to hurt you again.
HRRRGH
Go in peace and return to the beauty of the sea!
HRRRGH
SPLOOSH
That's what Rhodey looks li—
Be polite! He's someone's beloved town mascot!

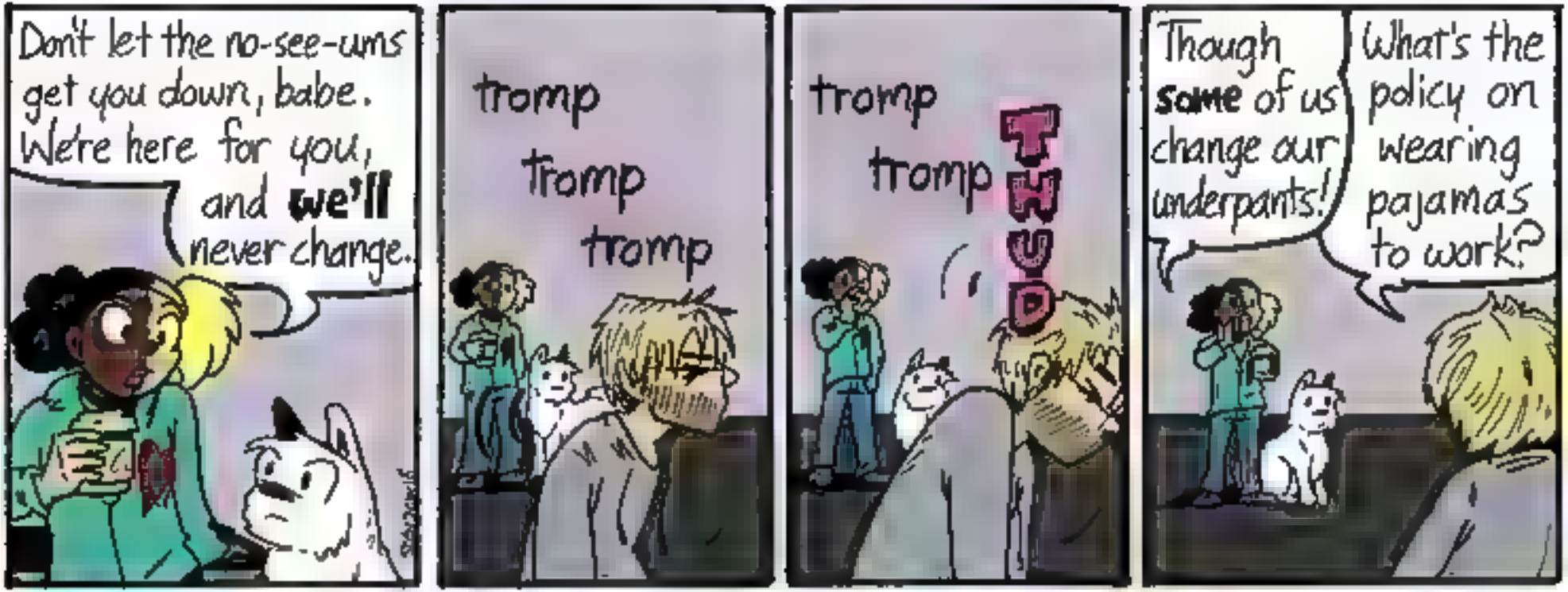

I don't know if Rhodey qualifies as sapient under SH guidelines.
Aw, we gotta look after him!
Agreed. But this reality blindness epidemic is gonna make a lot of work for us
When we get home, we'll be filling out paperwork for days
Does that mean putting off our first date?
Filling out paperwork is a date!
Love ya, babe.

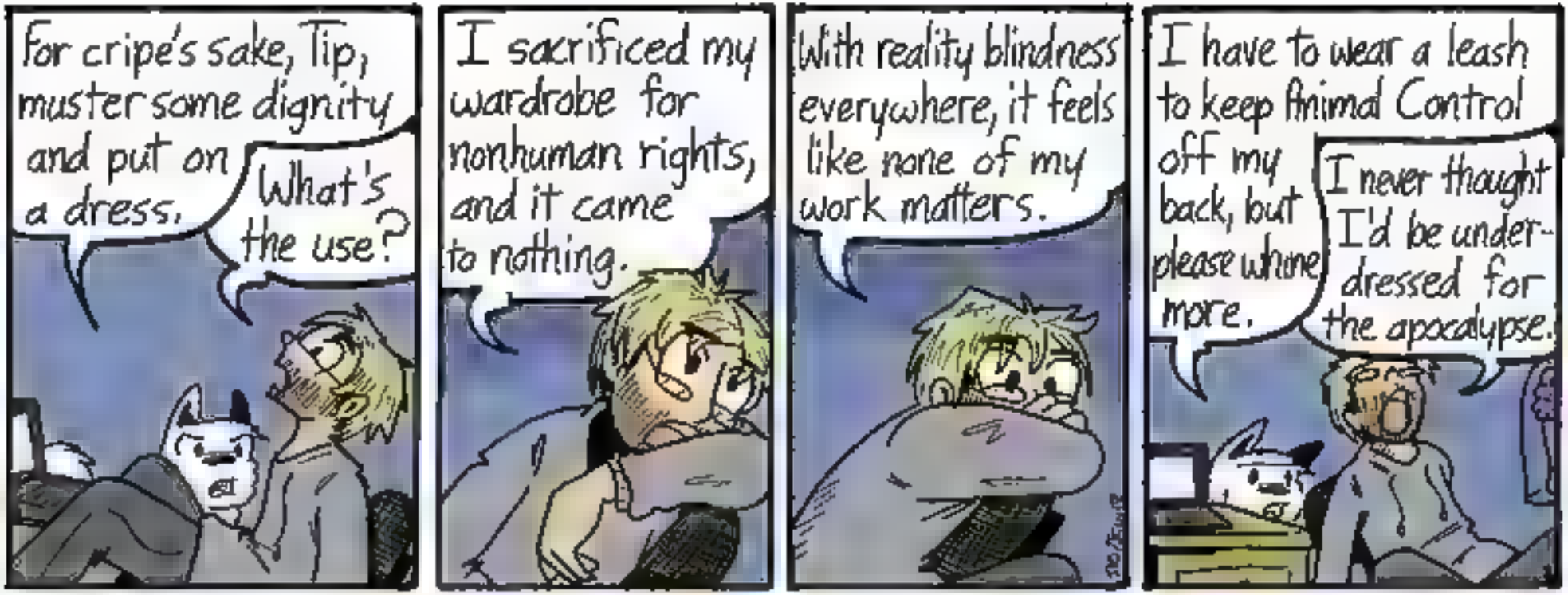

Jonah, I gotta come out and ask. Do you wanna go out?
STILL SEEING WEIRDNESS? Join the Forums!
Oh! Um! Whoa.
In, er, most timelines where we start dating this early, it doesn't last. I want to wait for the right time for a serious relationship.
Oh.
Yeah.
So until then can we just make out a lot?
Huh. Okay.


THE CACKLE OF CTHULHU
Alex Shvartsman
with stories by
Neil Gaiman
Ken Liu
Mike Resnick
Nick Mamatas
Jody Lynn Nye
Esther Friesner
and more!

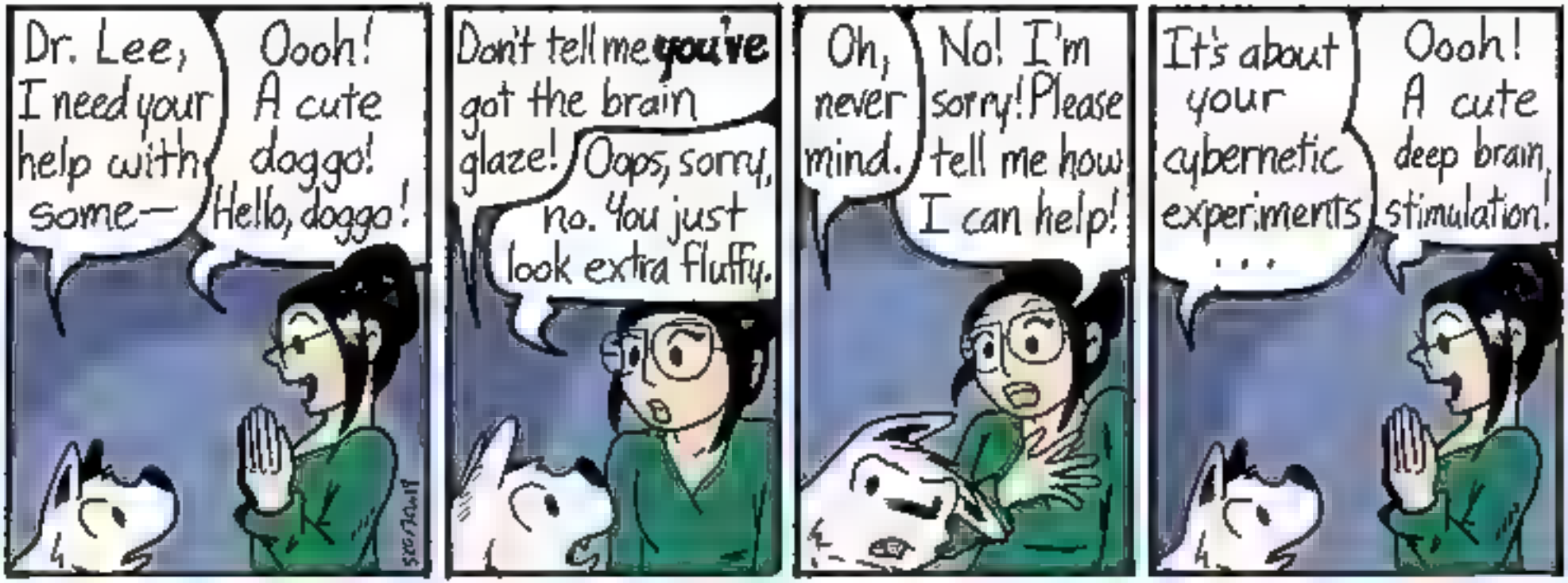
Back to the office. What crisis you wanna tackle first?
H.T.
He and his radical faction are taking advantage of the reality blindness to attack humans.
Don't they just see a tiger? Dude's asking to get put in a zoo.
He figured out that the weirder the reality, the less people see.
Let my biographers note the sacrifices I made for justice.
Done. Now let's raid this outlet mall!


I want to reserve a meeting room to discuss new devel-
Agent Unity! That had better be a service animal!
The spread of reality blindness must be addressed at—
All right! Doggie!
If you didn't read my memo, just say s—
Good boy! Scritchies!
The new world order can bite me.
Yeah! What about my scritchies, huh?

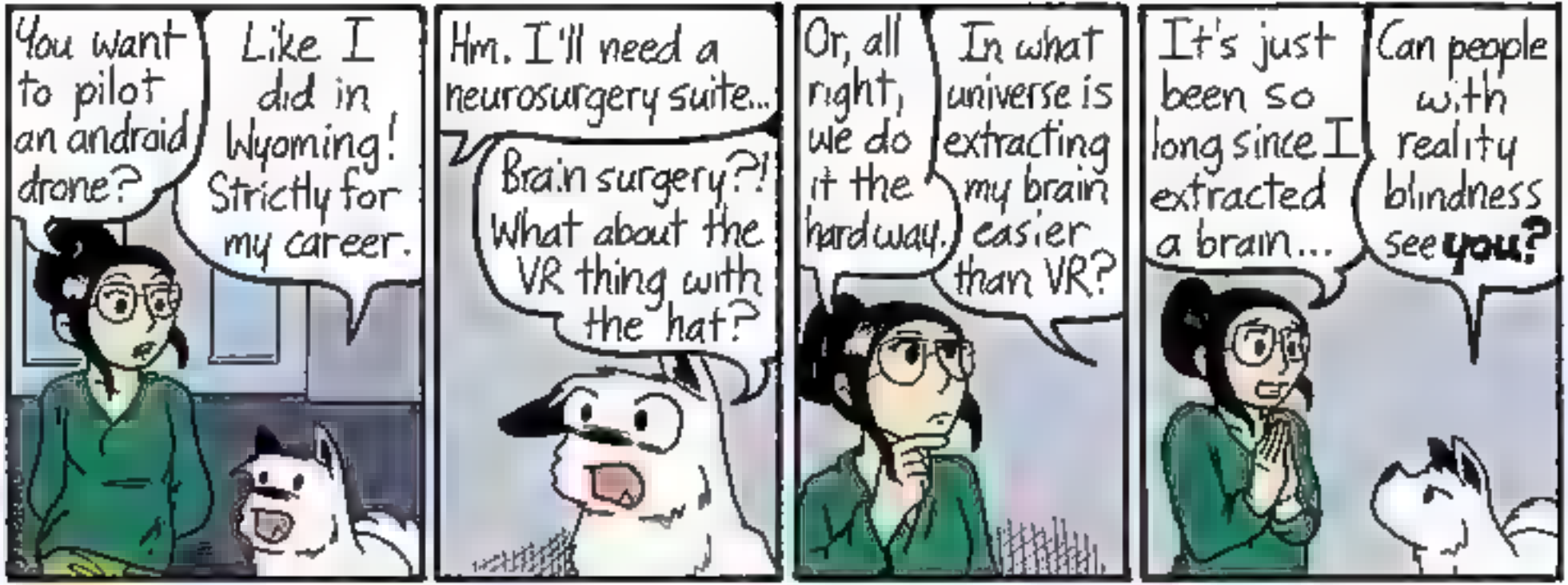

Don't let the no-see-ums get you down, babe. We're here for you, and we'll never change.
tromp
tromp
tromp
tromp
tromp
THUD
Though some of us change our underpants!
What's the policy on wearing pajamas to work?


For cripe's sake, Tip, muster some dignity and put on a dress.
What's the use?
I sacrificed my wardrobe for nonhuman rights, and it came to nothing.
With reality blindness everywhere, it feels like none of my work matters.
I have to wear a leash to keep Animal Control off my back, but please whine more.
I never thought I'd be under-dressed for the apocalypse.

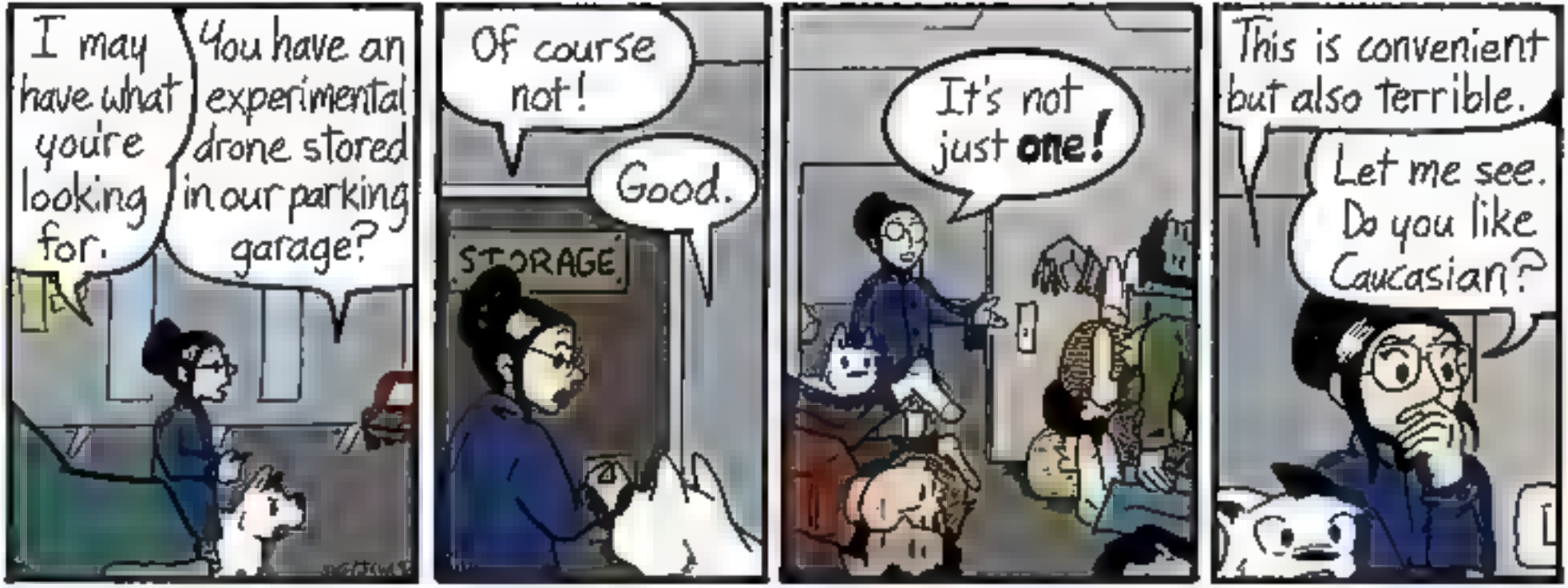
At least people see you. My job would be easy if I looked human.
Like when you piloted the Violet drone?
Exactly! But where can I get another android drone made with deep-shadow science tech?
As requested, I've sorted the toilet paper into white and off-white! What's my next assignment?
Dr. Lee, let's talk. Leave the paperwork to Tip.
I love volunteering!


Dr. Lee, I need your help with some—
Oooh! A cute doggo! Hello, doggo!
Don't tell me you've got the brain glaze!
Oops, sorry, no. You just look extra fluffy.
Oh, never mind.
No! I'm sorry! Please tell me how I can help!
It's about your cybernetic experiments . . .
Oooh! A cute deep brain stimulation!

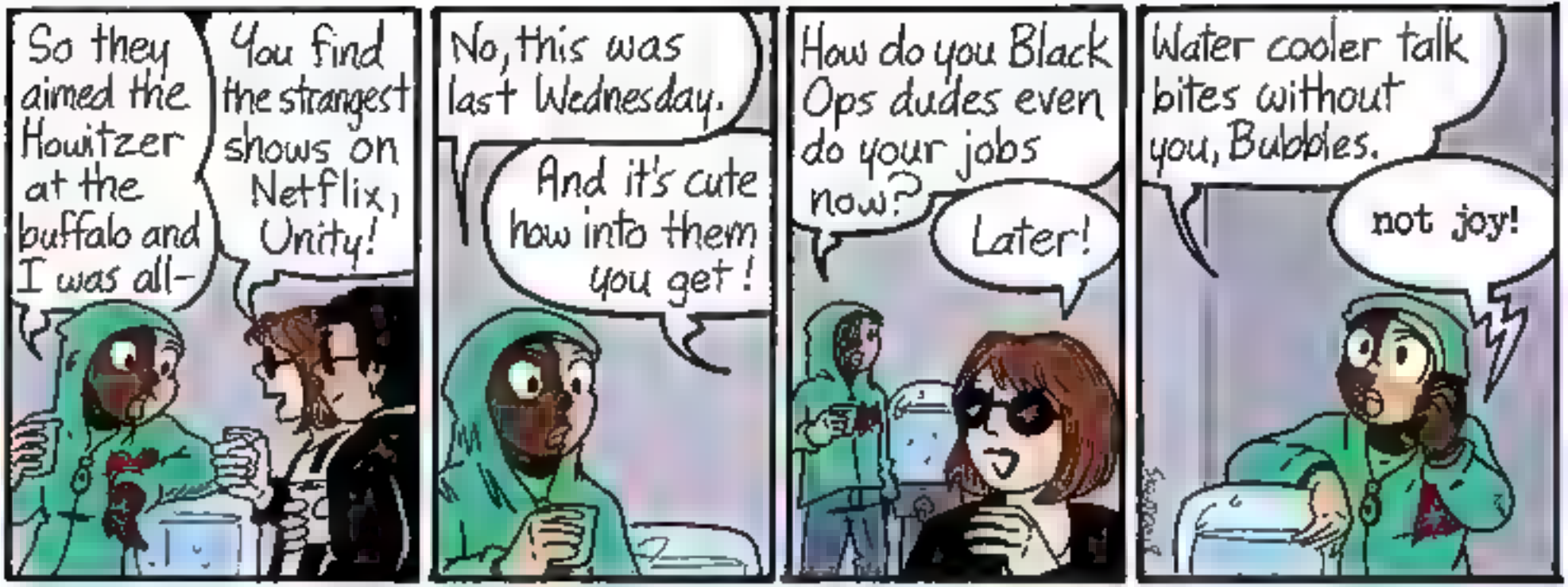
My new skeevy informant pal gave me double secret clearance so I can find aliens AND cure your cancer! MULDER AWAY!
It's like we were never on hiatus.

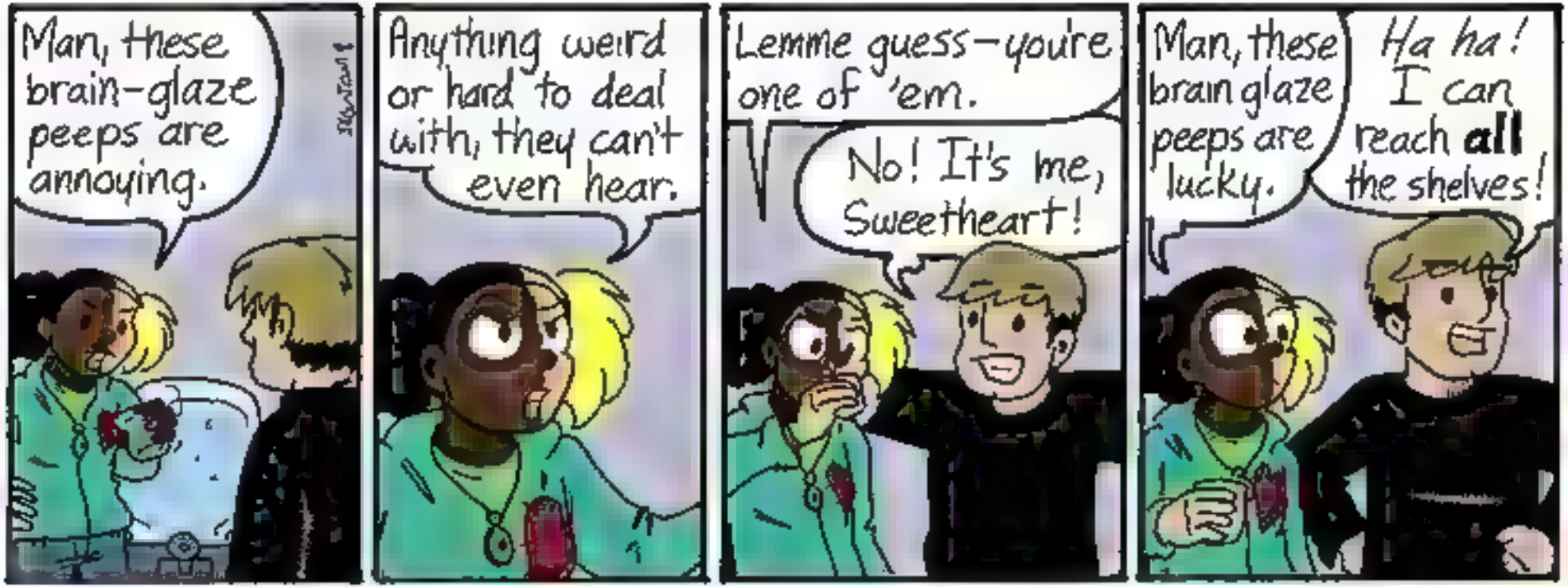

You want to pilot an android drone?
Like I did in Wyoming! Strictly for my career.
Hm. I'll need a neurosurgery suite...
Brain surgery?! What about the VR thing with the hat?
Or, all right, we do it the hard way.
In what universe is extracting my brain easier than VR?
It's just been so long since I extracted a brain...
Can people with reality blindness see you?

A human suit for the office, eh? Any special requests?
Yes! I want a look that commands respect.
I want to be inside a man!
Pffft
hee hee hee hee
SNORT
It usually— goes— the other way around—
I'm giving myself a bonus for putting up with this.


I may have what you're looking for.
You have an experimental drone stored in our parking garage?
Of course not!
Good.
STORAGE
It's not just one!
This is convenient but also terrible.
Let me see. Do you like Caucasian?

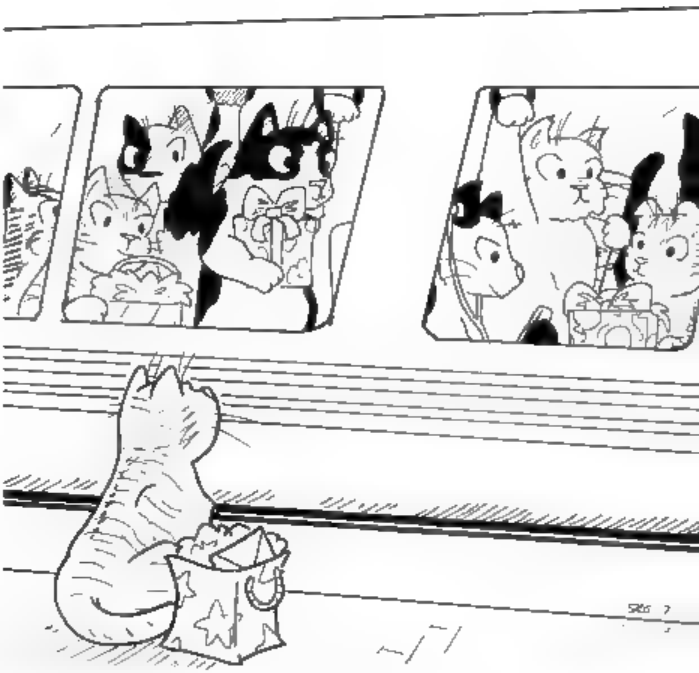
Where did you get all these drones?
Anasigma test models. It seemed a shame to melt them down.
Say, does Nick know he could borrow one of these?
Oh, he's nappy as he is.
Sure, but haven't you thought about ways he could use a humanoid body?
not during work hours
I heard that!
Darn your dog ears!


So they aimed the Howitzer at the buffalo and I was all-
You find the strangest shows on Netflix, Unity!
No, this was last Wednesday.
And it's cute how into them you get!
How do you Black Ops dudes even do your jobs now?
Later!
Water cooler talk bites without you, Bubbles.
not joy!

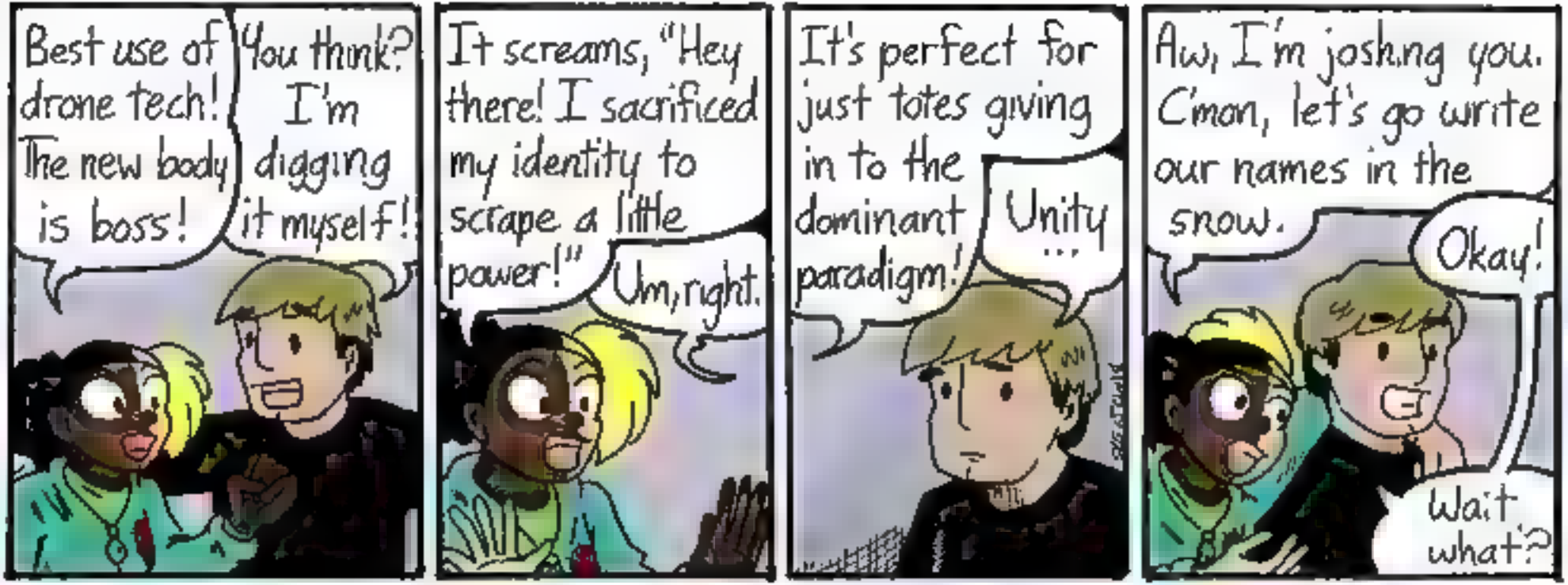

Man, these brain-glaze peeps are annoying.
Anything weird or hard to deal with, they can't even hear.
Lemme guess—you're one of 'em.
No! It's me, Sweetheart!
Man, these brain glaze peeps are lucky.
Ha ha! I can reach all the shelves!

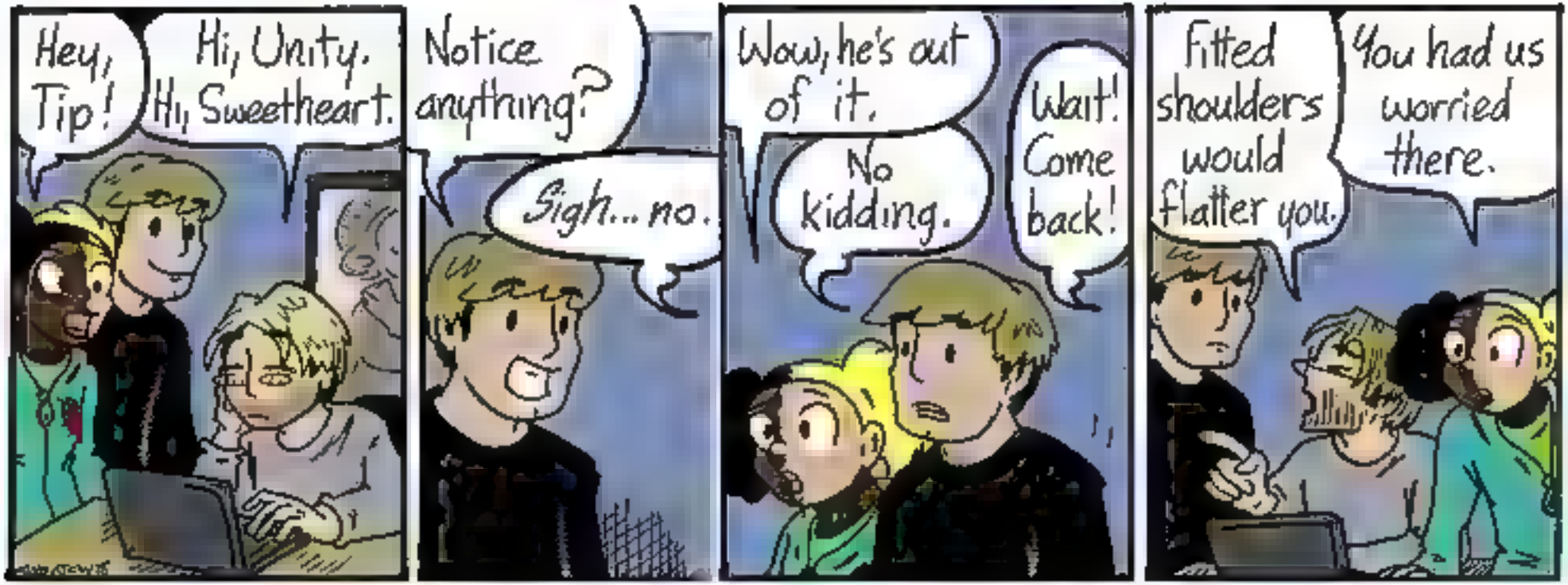
Eve the Cat's Birthday

Eve the cat had her birthday party at Habitot.* It was the first birthday there and it was cats only.

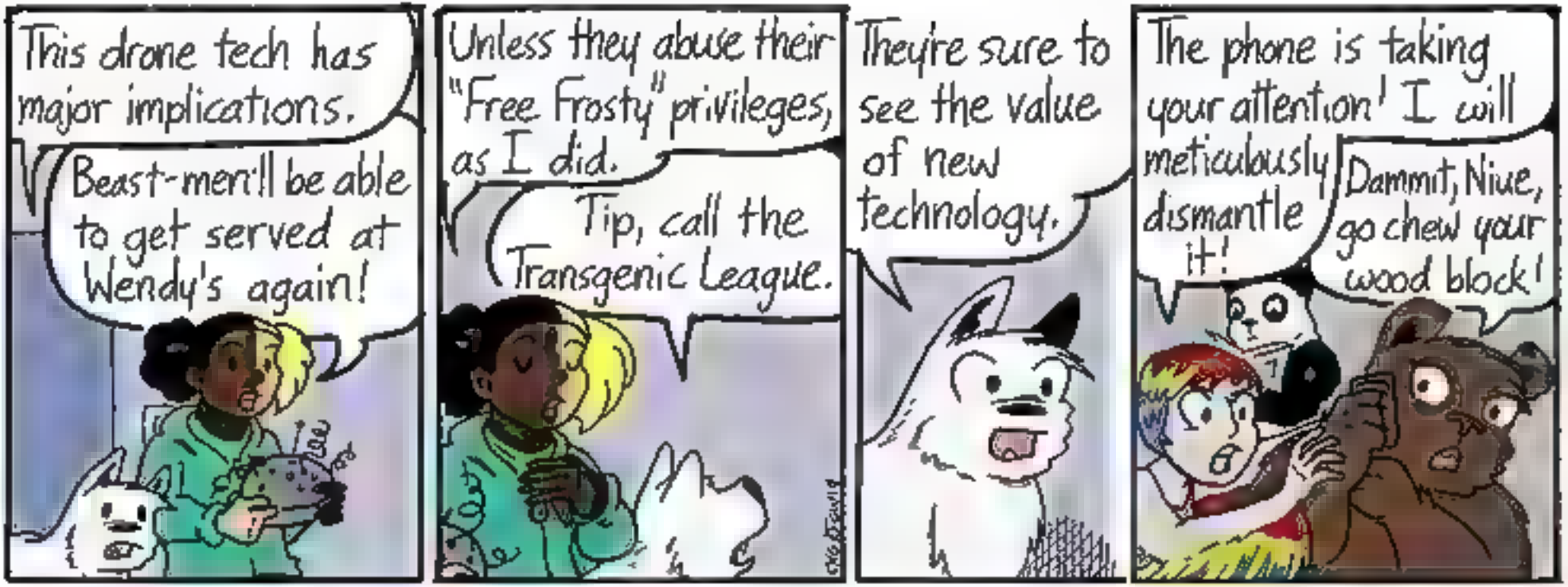


*A play space in Berkeley of which Robin is very fond


Best use of drone tech! The new body is boss!
You think? I'm digging it myself!
It screams, "Hey there! I sacrificed my identity to scrape a little power!"
Um, right.
It's perfect for just totes giving in to the dominant paradigm!
Unity...
Aw, I'm joshing you. C'mon, let's go write our names in the snow.
Okay!
Wait, what?


Hey, Tip!
Hi, Unity.
Hi, Sweetheart.
Notice anything?
Sigh... no.
Wow, he's out of it.
No kidding.
Wait! Come back!
Fitted shoulders would flatter you.
You had us worried there.

Hey, Dr. E! It's your director who can interact with staff now!
Good. We have a supply form crisis.
All forms must be routed through me.
You said that was inefficient!
Do try to keep up with policy.
You don't have policy! You have whims!
My whims are scrupulously vetted.
Interacting with staff: bad idea.


This drone tech has major implications.
Beast-men'll be able to get served at Wendy's again!
Unless they abuse their "Free Frosty" privileges, as I did.
Tip, call the Transgenic League.
They're sure to see the value of new technology.
The phone is taking your attention! I will meticulously dismantle it!
Dammit, Niue, go chew your wood block!

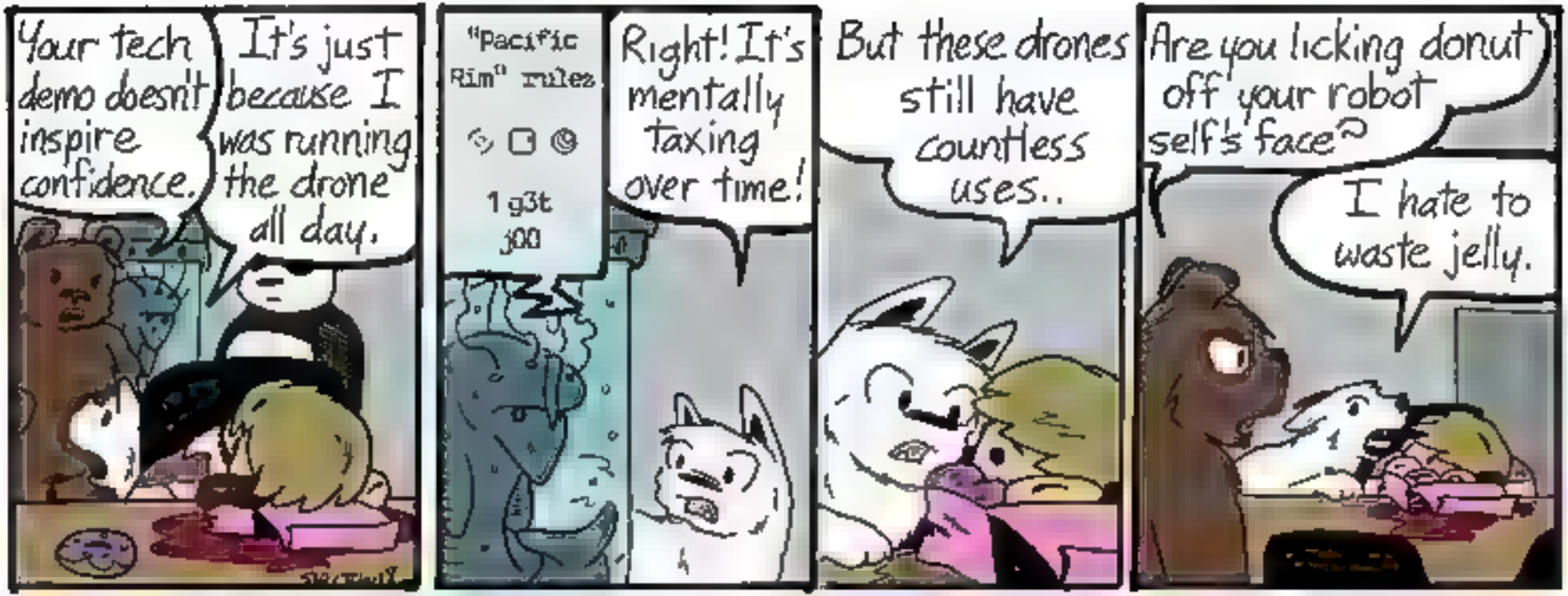
Hi! It's me, Sweetheart, operating a remote-controlled man!
And Skin Horse maintains its quiet dignity.
Where's that awful man who wears hats?
With this drone, I don't need Tip here!
I hope in time you'll come to trust—
Hairpin mood swing! I love you completely!
Is this your parrot DNA or is my privilege just that rad?
Please scratch my head, best friend.

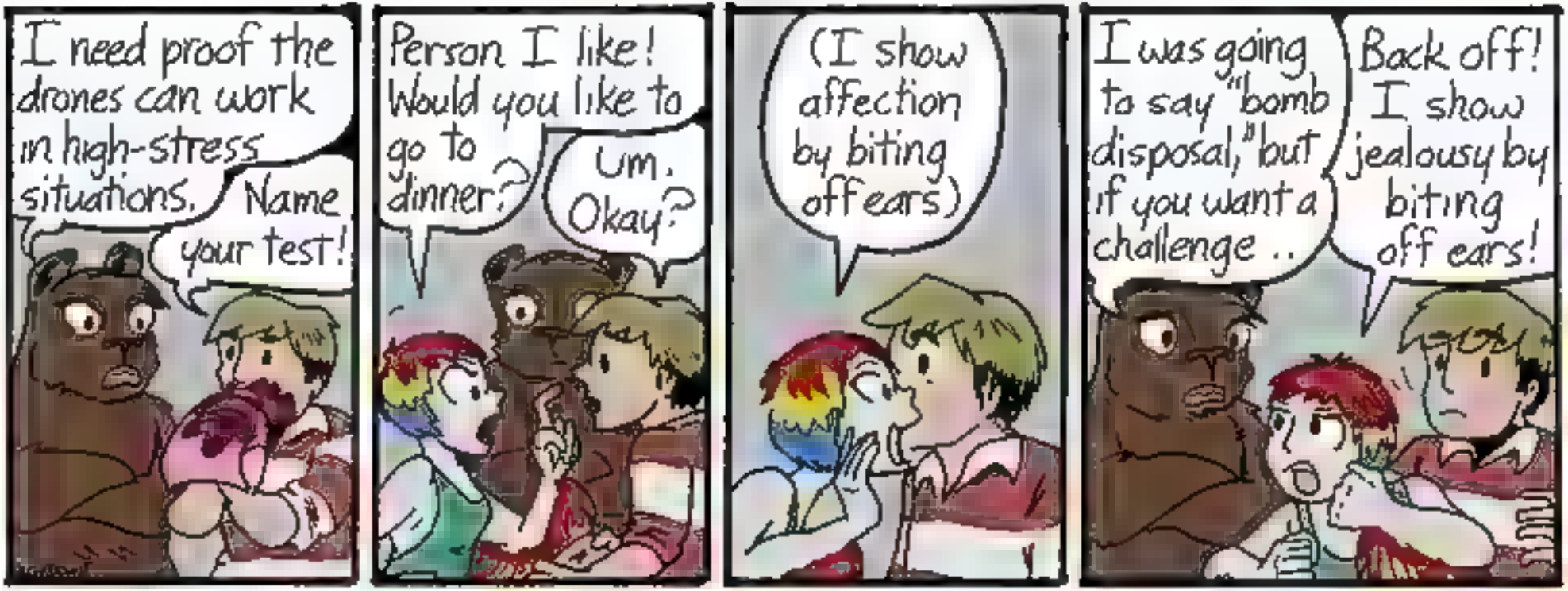
Mass brainwashing has marginalized anyone who doesn't look human.
I barely pass. Others aren't so lucky.
I'm your solution! With humanoid drones, we can do anything humans can!
fzzt
SPLIT
including what the humans call FAILZ
Text from Sweetheart: "I meant to do that."

Hoots

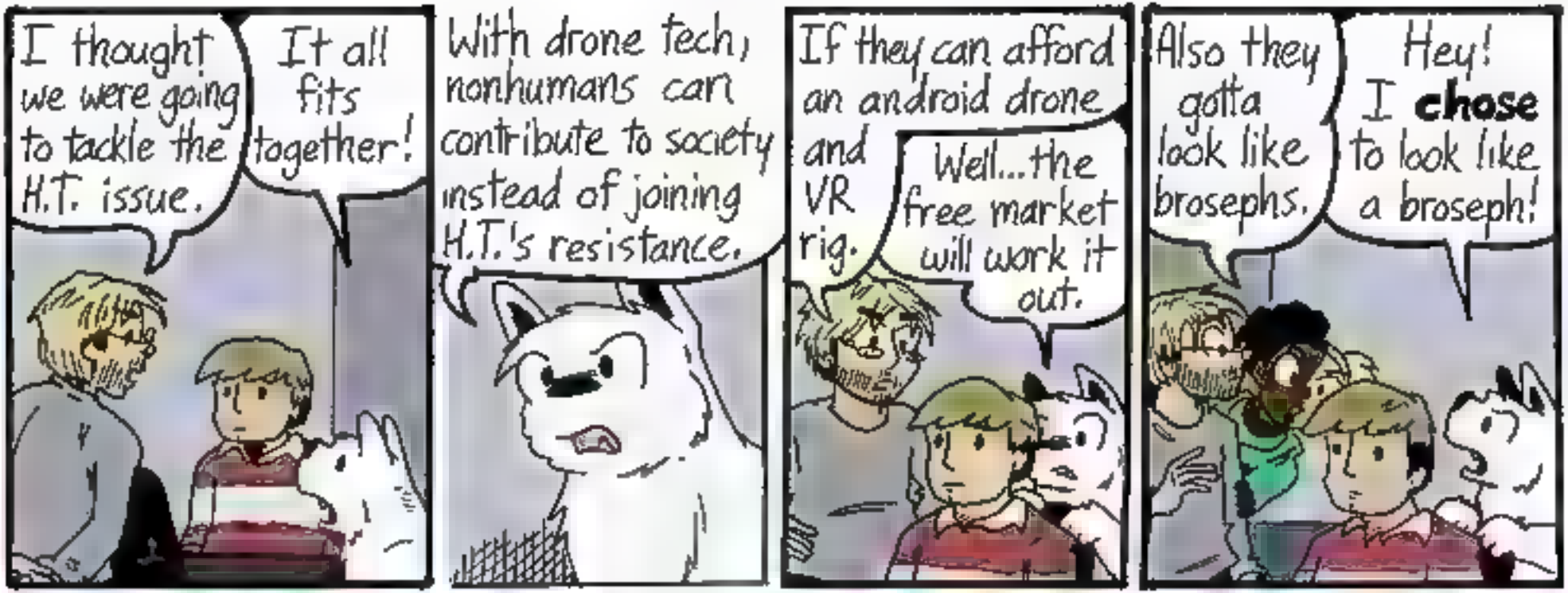
If I was as tall as you
I would put a diamond in the sky
If I was as tall as you
I would put a diamond in the sky
If you were as tall as a train
I would put a diamond in the sky
If I was as tall as a grownup
A train would go way up there

An owl goes hoot, hoot, hoot
Hoo, hoo hoot

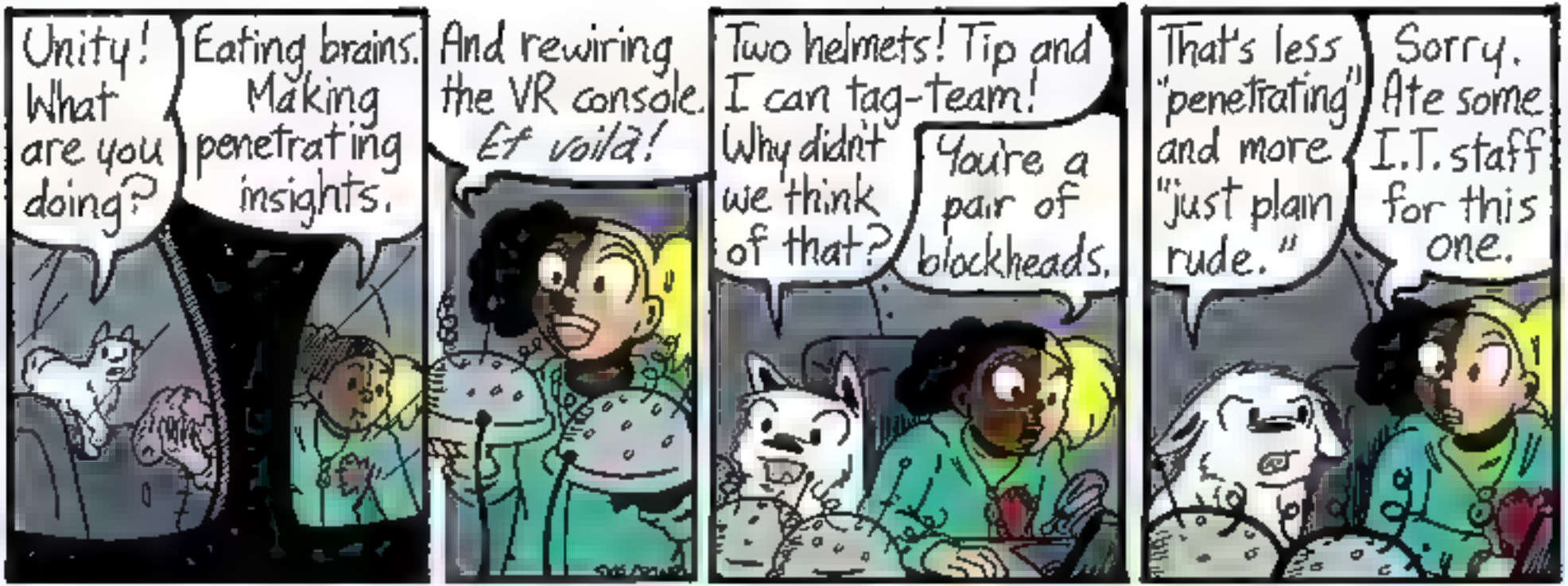

Your tech demo doesn't inspire confidence.
It's just because I was running the drone all day.
"Pacific Rim" rulez
1 g3t j00
Right! It's mentally taxing over time!
But these drones still have countless uses..
Are you licking donut off your robot self's face?
I hate to waste jelly.


I need proof the drones can work in high-stress situations.
Name your test!
Person I like! Would you like to go to dinner?
Um. Okay?
(I show affection by biting off ears)
I was going to say "bomb disposal," but if you want a challenge ..
Back off! I show jealousy by biting off ears!

Tip! Emergency romance help!
Right now, anyone's better at romance than me.
But I'm going out with Niue!
From the Transgenic League? What about Unity?
I'll deal with that later! Feed me smooth lines with plenty of "game"!
Strike that. There's always someone worse.
"Are those pants mirrored? 'Cause I can see myself in them!"


I thought we were going to tackle the H.T. issue.
It all fits together!
With drone tech, nonhumans can contribute to society instead of joining H.T.'s resistance.
If they can afford an android drone and VR rig.
Well...the free market will work it out.
Also they gotta look like brosephs.
Hey! I **chose** to look like a broseph!

Hey, Dude Babe and Garbage Tip. Who ate you guys's grandpa?
This isn't working.
Sweetheart's social skills are bad enough without the constant shorting out.
FZZT
I SAY A CHARMING THING!
It's too much for one operator.
Hold the line. I'mo go get smart.
Do you have an idea, or is this an excuse to eat brains?
It can be two things!


Unity! What are you doing?
Eating brains. Making penetrating insights.
And rewiring the VR console. Et voilà!
Two helmets! Tip and I can tag-team! Why didn't we think of that?
You're a pair of blockheads.
That's less "penetrating" and more "just plain rude."
Sorry. Ate some I.T. staff for this one.

AGNES STARBREAKER

Bootlegger of Mars

RICARDO "ROJO" CORTEZ

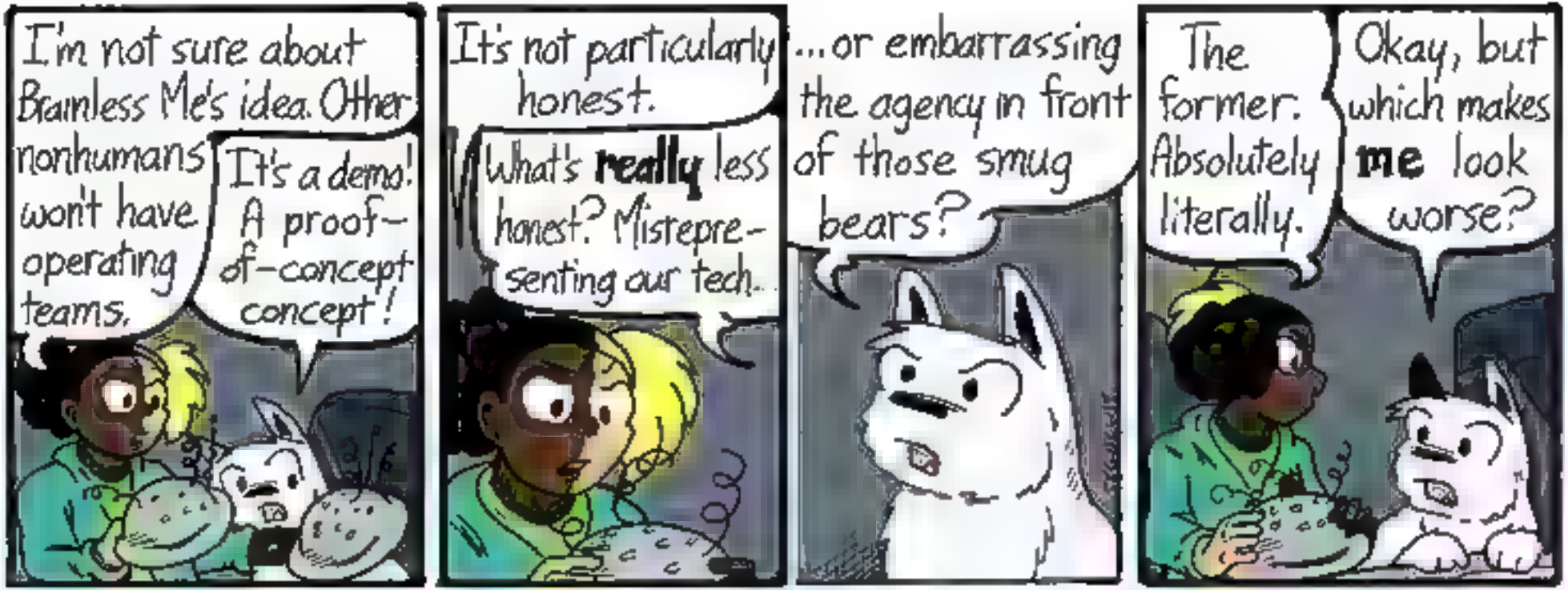
Hired Muscle

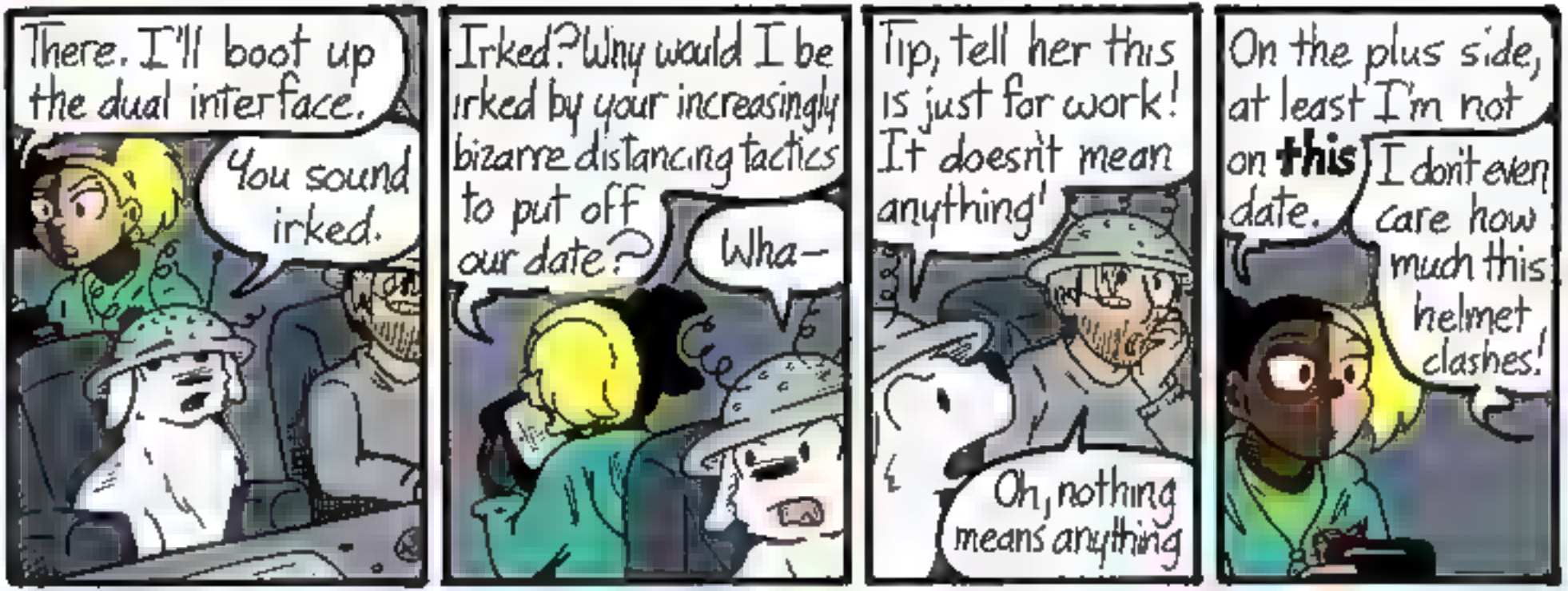
VITA HWANG

Ma'am

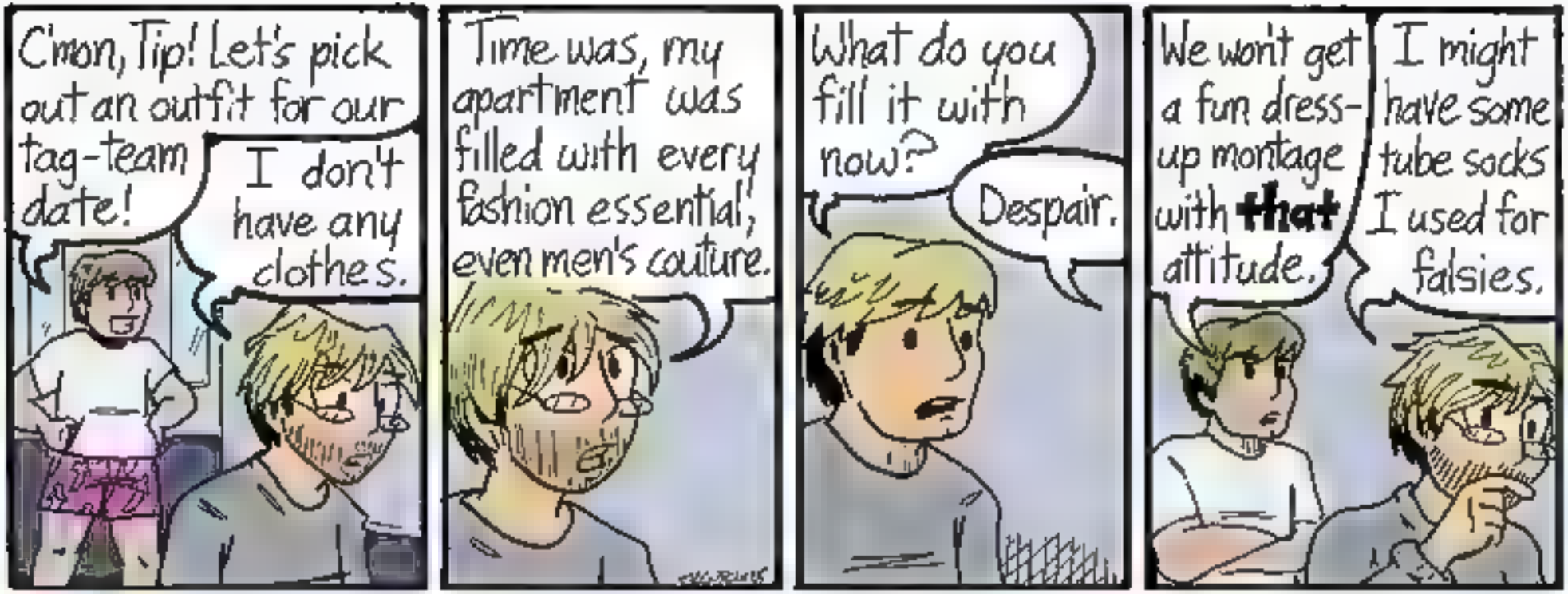
BABYFACE KEPLER

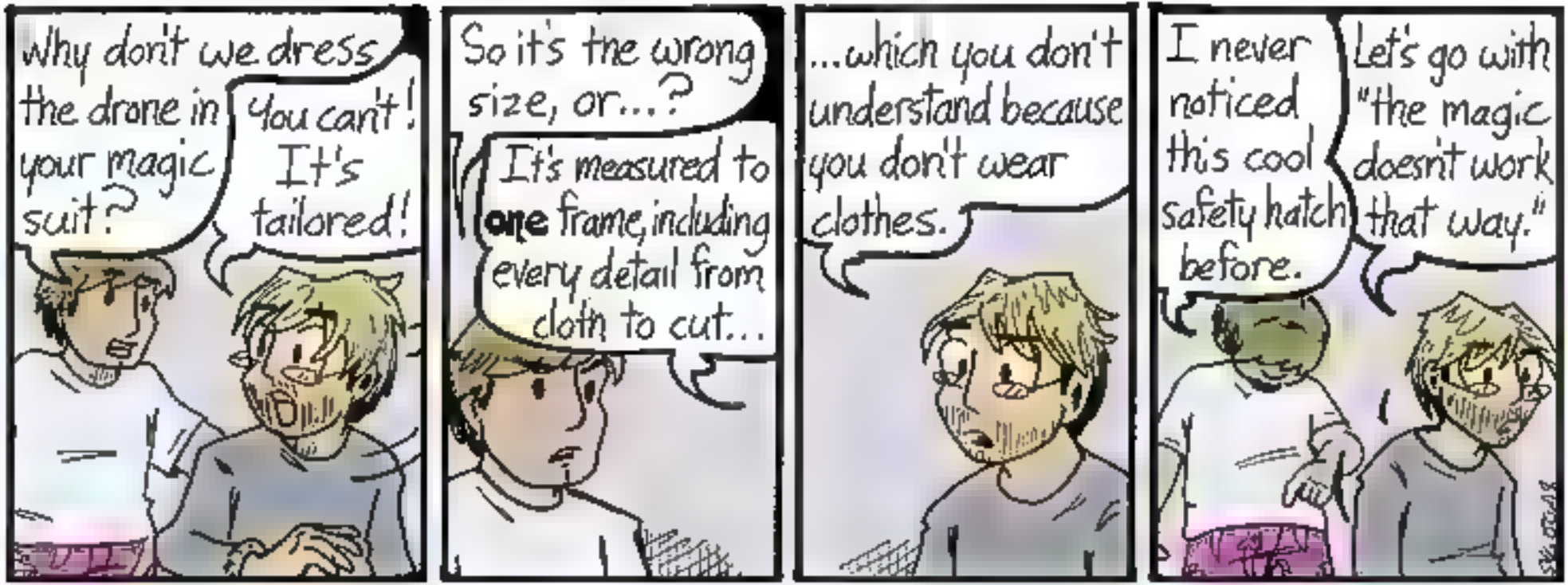
Gangland

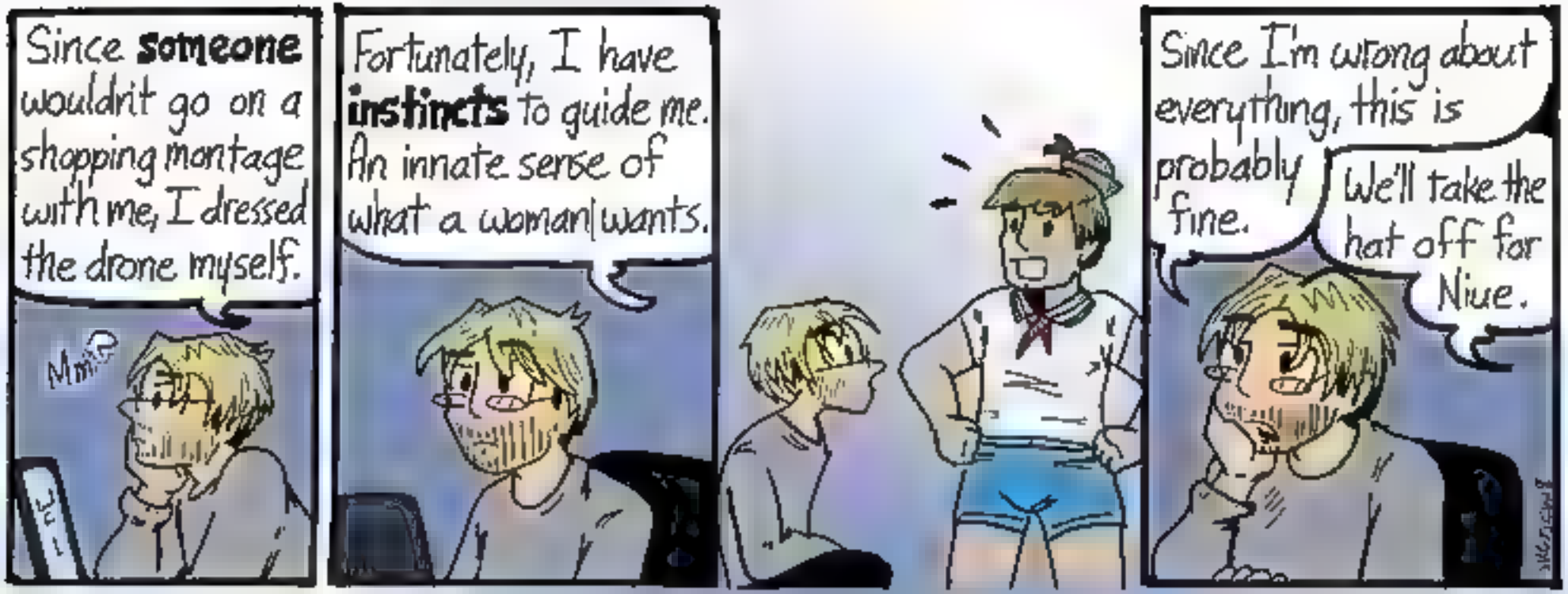

I'm not sure about Brainless Me's idea. Other nonhumans won't have operating teams.
It's a demo! A proof-of-concept concept!
It's not particularly honest.
What's **really** less honest? Misrepresenting our tech...
...or embarrassing the agency in front of those smug bears?
The former. Absolutely literally.
Okay, but which makes **me** look worse?

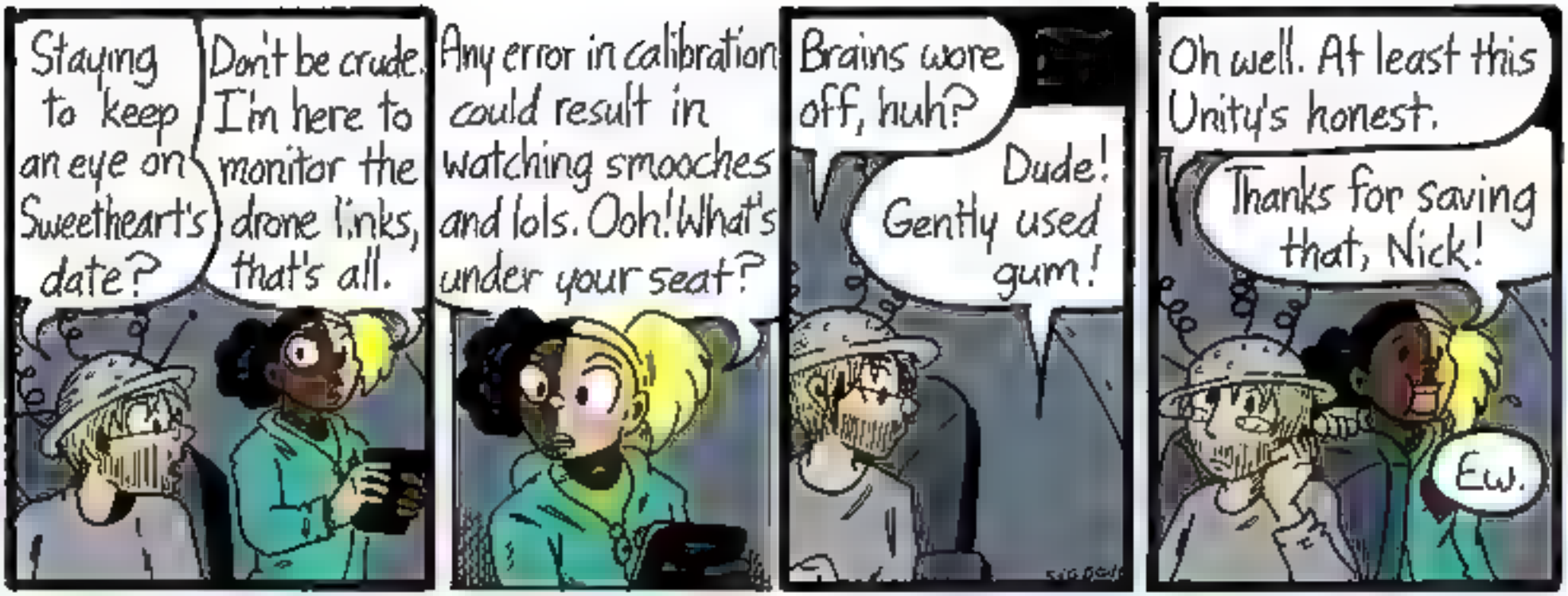

There. I'll boot up the dual interface.
You sound irked.
Irked? Why would I be irked by your increasingly bizarre distancing tactics to put off our date?
Wha—
Tip, tell her this is just for work! It doesn't mean anything!
Oh, nothing means anything
On the plus side, at least I'm not on this date.
I don't even care how much this helmet clashes!

All right, Tip. You connected to the drone?
Yes! I.. I'm...
I'm not beautiful! I'm handsome, but I'm not **beautiful!** This is so wrong!
Even worse, this is still better than the way I look now!
Nick, I'm surprised you've stayed quiet through all this.
Sport, I ain't gonna mess with perfection.
Who popped my collar? What hell is this?

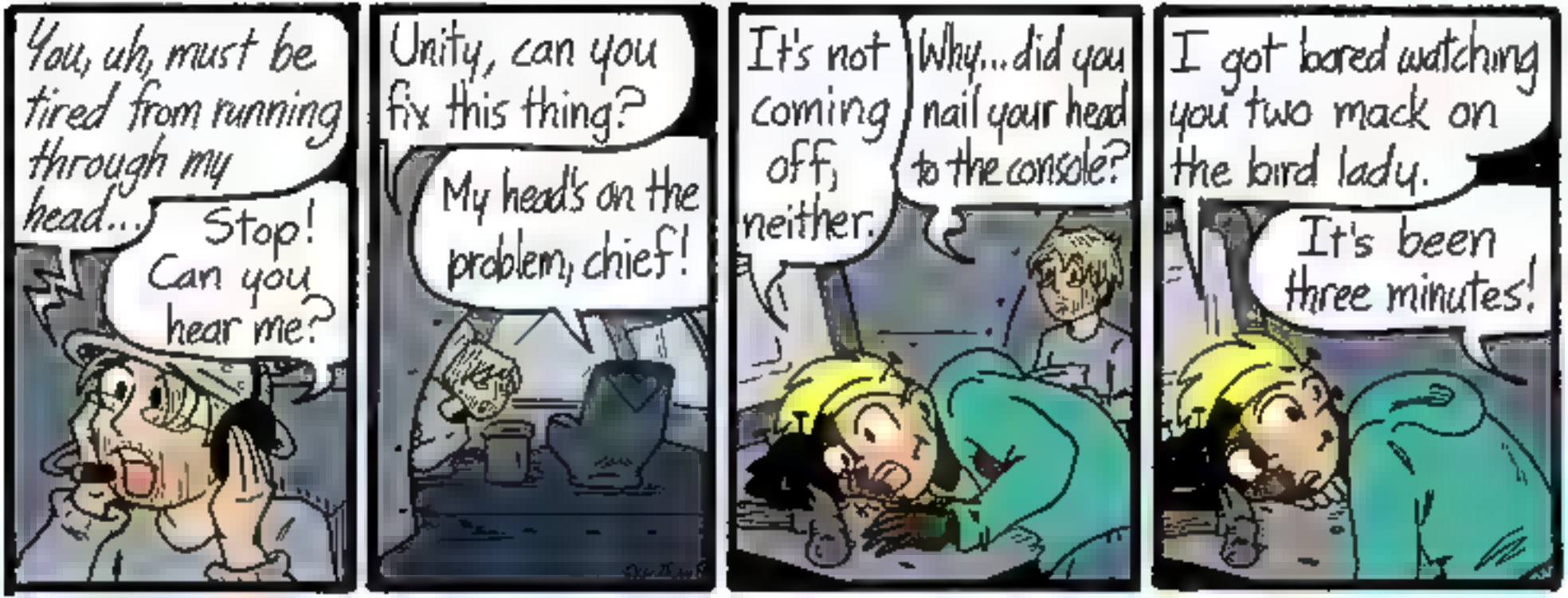

C'mon, Tip! Let's pick out an outfit for our tag-team date!
I don't have any clothes.
Time was, my apartment was filled with every fashion essential, even men's couture.
What do you fill it with now?
Despair.
We won't get a fun dress-up montage with that attitude.
I might have some tube socks I used for falsies.


Why don't we dress the drone in your magic suit?
You can't! It's tailored!
So it's the wrong size, or...?
It's measured to one frame, including every detail from cloth to cut...
...which you don't understand because you don't wear clothes.
I never noticed this cool safety hatch before.
Let's go with "the magic doesn't work that way."

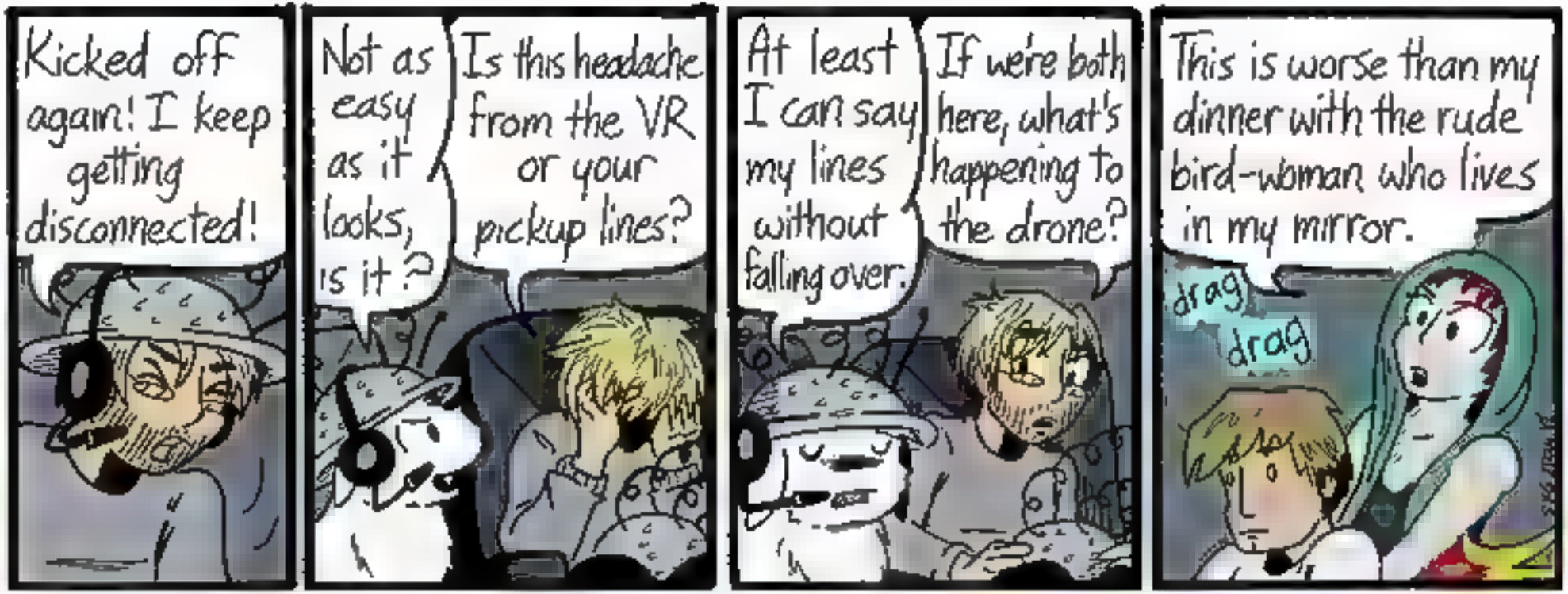

Since someone wouldn't go on a shopping montage with me, I dressed the drone myself.
Mm?
Fortunately, I have instincts to guide me. An innate sense of what a woman wants.
Since I'm wrong about everything, this is probably fine.
We'll take the hat off for Niue.

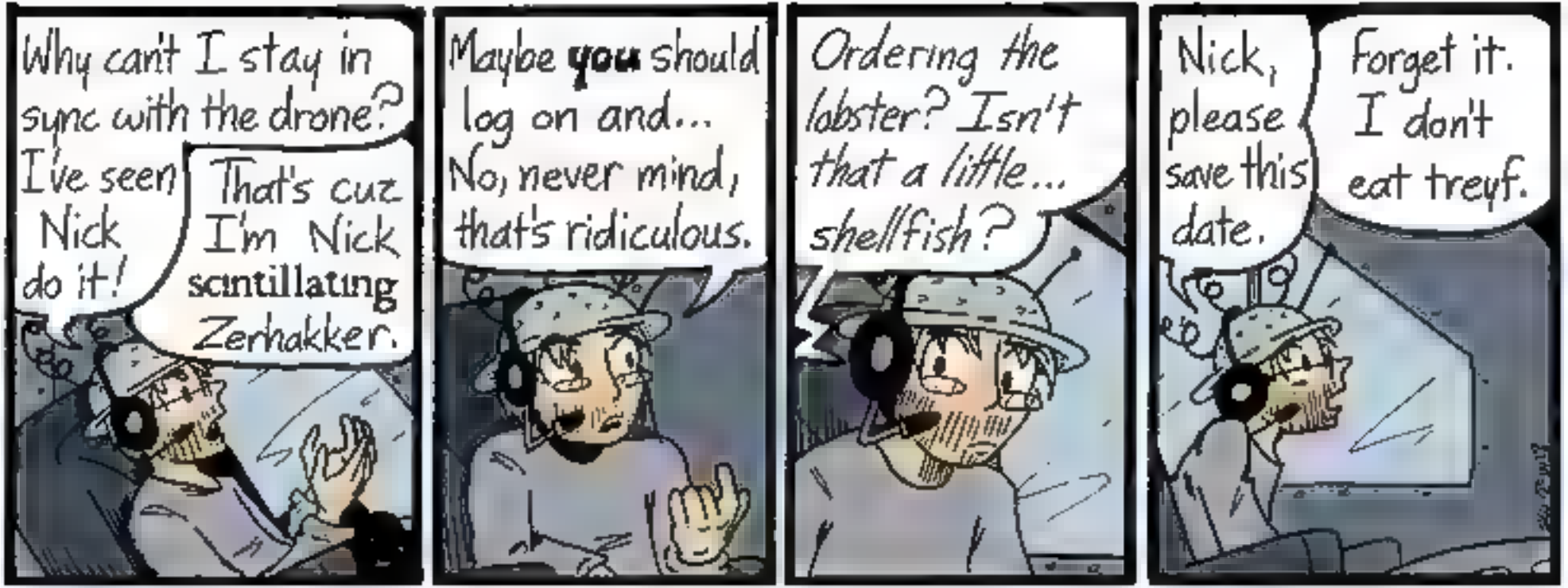

Staying to keep an eye on Sweetheart's date?
Don't be crude. I'm here to monitor the drone links, that's all.
Any error in calibration could result in watching smooches and lols. Ooh! What's under your seat?
Brains wore off, huh?
Dude! Gently used gum!
Oh well. At least this Unity's honest.
Thanks for saving that, Nick!
Ew.

Remember, this will succeed only with teamwork
Well-oiled machine. Understood.
Hello, best friend! You're... interestingly dressed for dinner!
fzzt
... Tip? Little help?
Sorry?
Um, are your pants mirrored?
She's not even wearing pants!
Do you know karate? 'Cause your body is kickin'!


You, uh, must be tired from running through my head...
Stop! Can you hear me?
Unity, can you fix this thing?
My head's on the problem, chief!
It's not coming off, neither.
Why... did you nail your head to the console?
I got bored watching you two mack on the bird lady.
It's been three minutes!

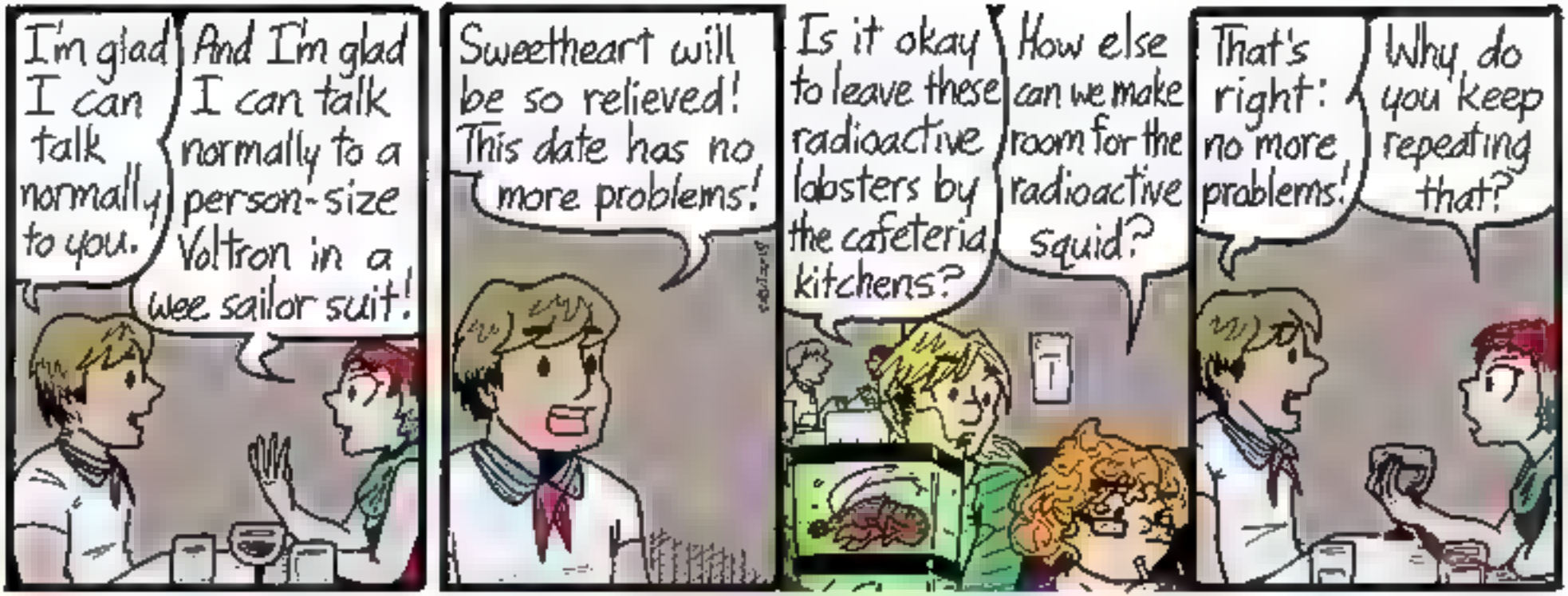
Have you got a map? I'm lost in your eyes!
Must remain calm..no matter how bad her lines get..
Good thing you're 60% water, 'cause I'm thirsty!
Nope. Going in.
fzzt
KLUNK
Wait, how do I work the legs?
You really are dehydrated.

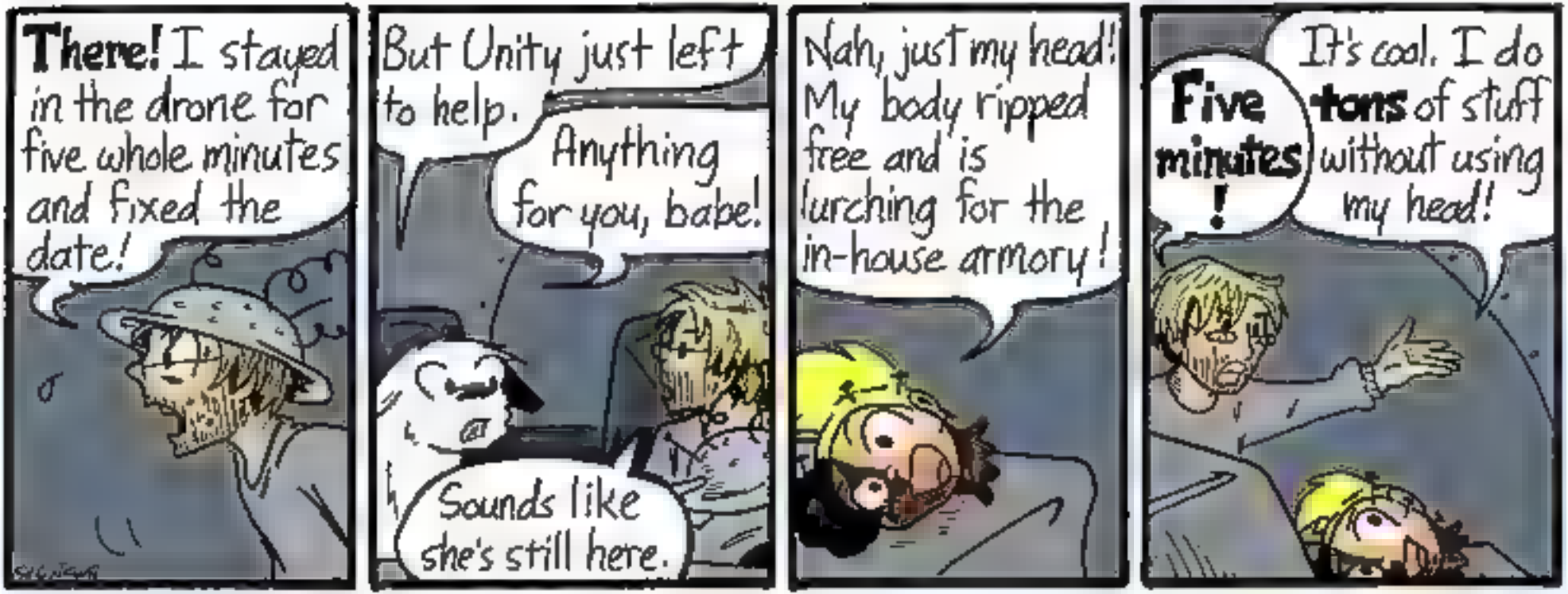

Kicked off again! I keep getting disconnected!
Not as easy as it looks, is it?
Is this headache from the VR or your pickup lines?
At least I can say my lines without falling over.
If we're both here, what's happening to the drone?
This is worse than my dinner with the rude bird-woman who lives in my mirror.
drag
drag

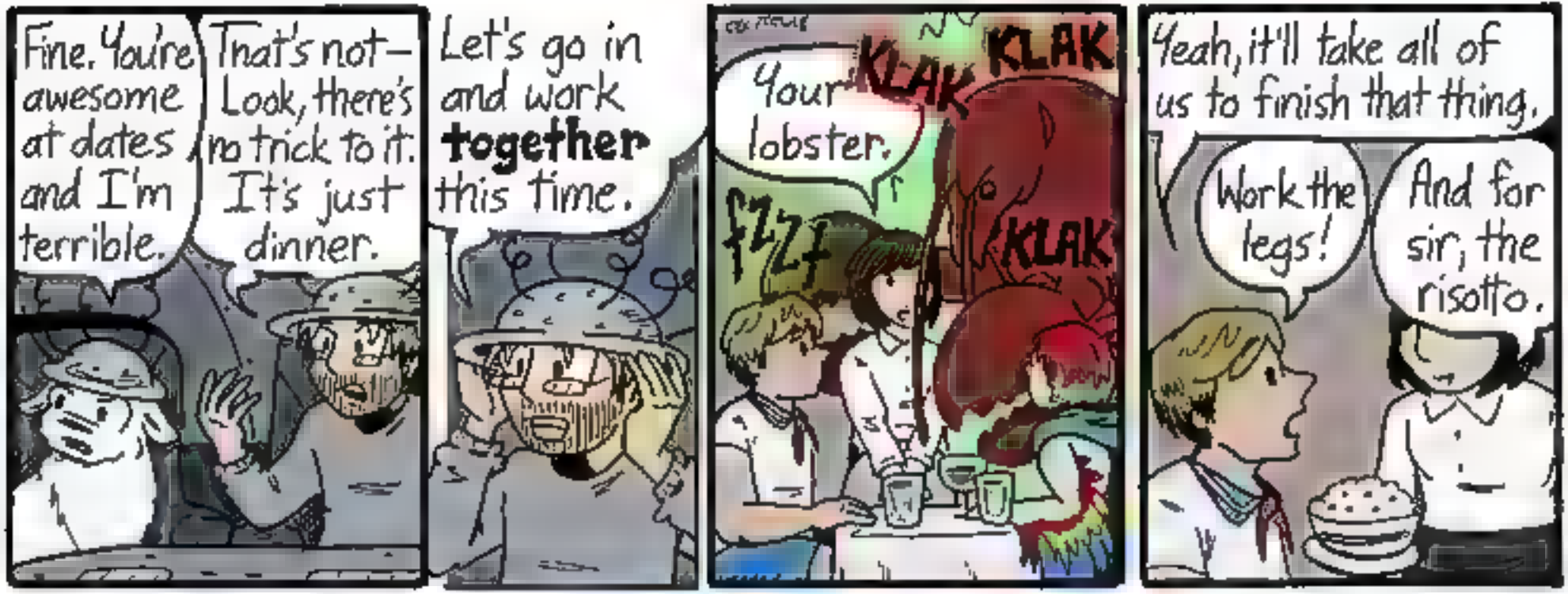

Why can't I stay in sync with the drone?
I've seen Nick do it!
That's cuz I'm Nick scintillating Zerhakker.
Maybe you should log on and... No, never mind, that's ridiculous.
Ordering the lobster? Isn't that a little... shellfish?
Nick, please save this date.
Forget it. I don't eat treyf.

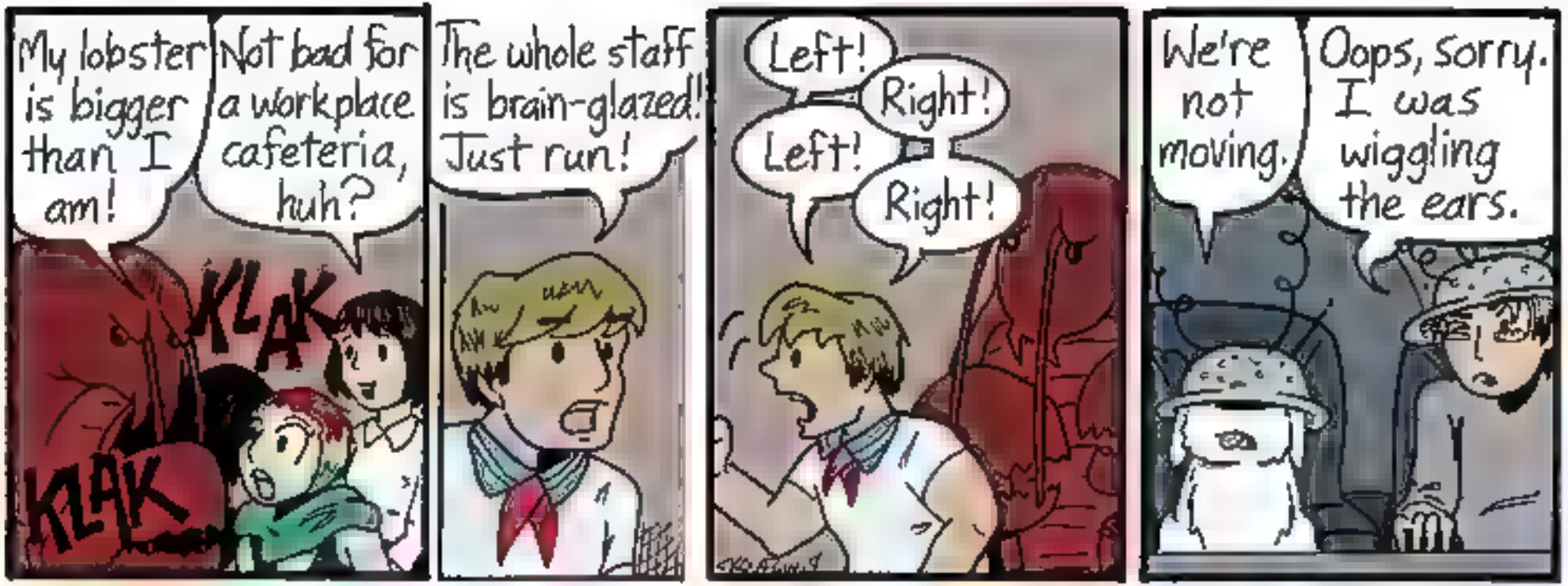
Maddbood has secret videos where he wears Kylo Ren pants & shows off his sweet ~~blade~~ skills
Look at this Maddbood has an im crew too
Man & tes Dog R
things get real

Er...Niue, do you understand this is an android drone?
Of course, Dr. Wilkin.
How can you tell it's me?
Hmph. The human "bird-brain" stereotype is false.
Parrots are very intelligent. I can easily recognize you in another body.
But I turn into a completely new person if I put on a
ARRGH HATS I WILL CHEW THEM TO BITS

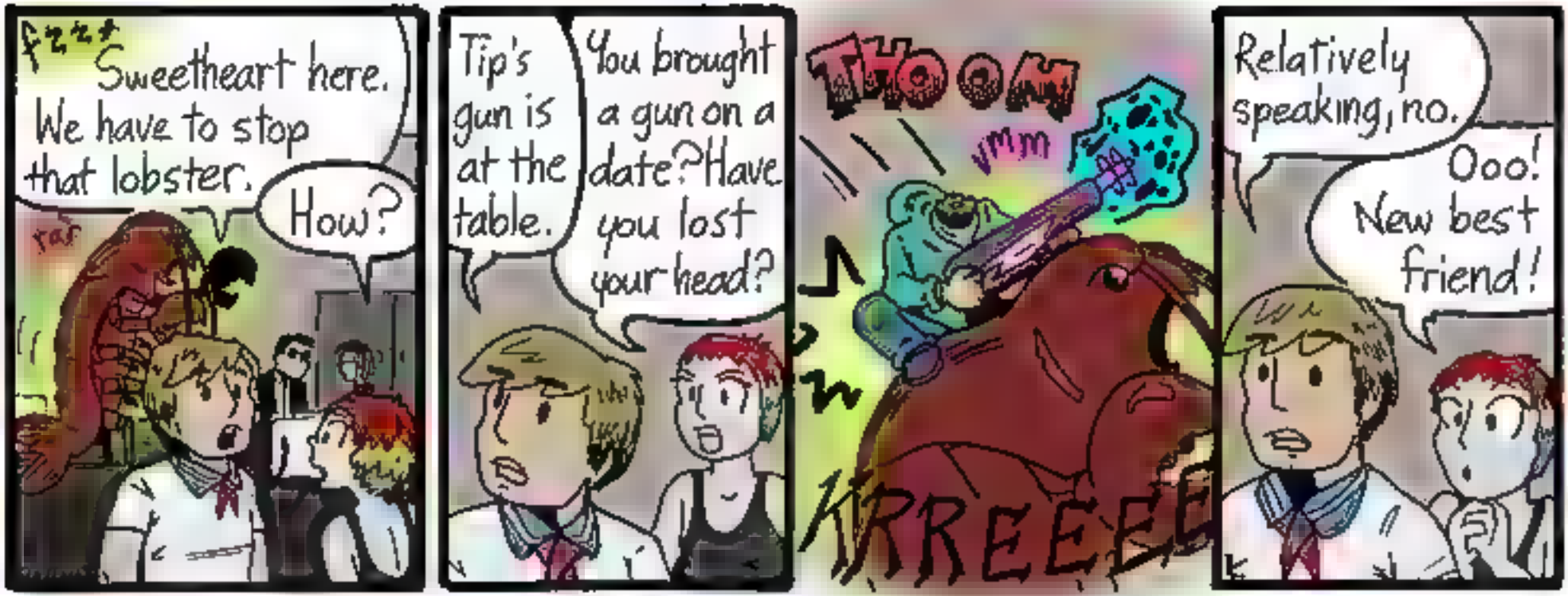

I'm glad I can talk normally to you.
And I'm glad I can talk normally to a person-size Voltron in a wee sailor suit!
Sweetheart will be so relieved! This date has no more problems!
Is it okay to leave these radioactive lobsters by the cafeteria kitchens?
How else can we make room for the radioactive squid?
That's right: no more problems!
Why do you keep repeating that?

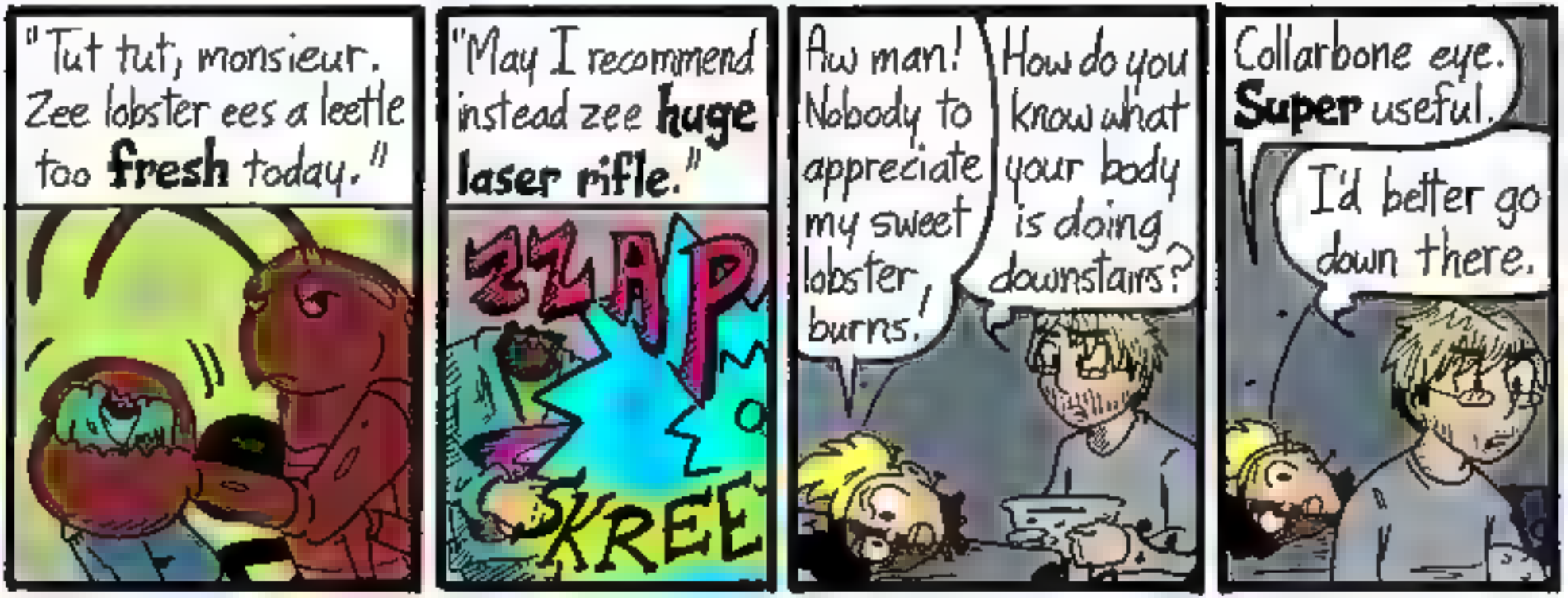

There! I stayed in the drone for five whole minutes and fixed the date!
But Unity just left to help.
Anything for you, babe!
Sounds like she's still here.
Nah, just my head! My body ripped free and is lurching for the in-house armory!
Five minutes!
It's cool. I do tons of stuff without using my head!

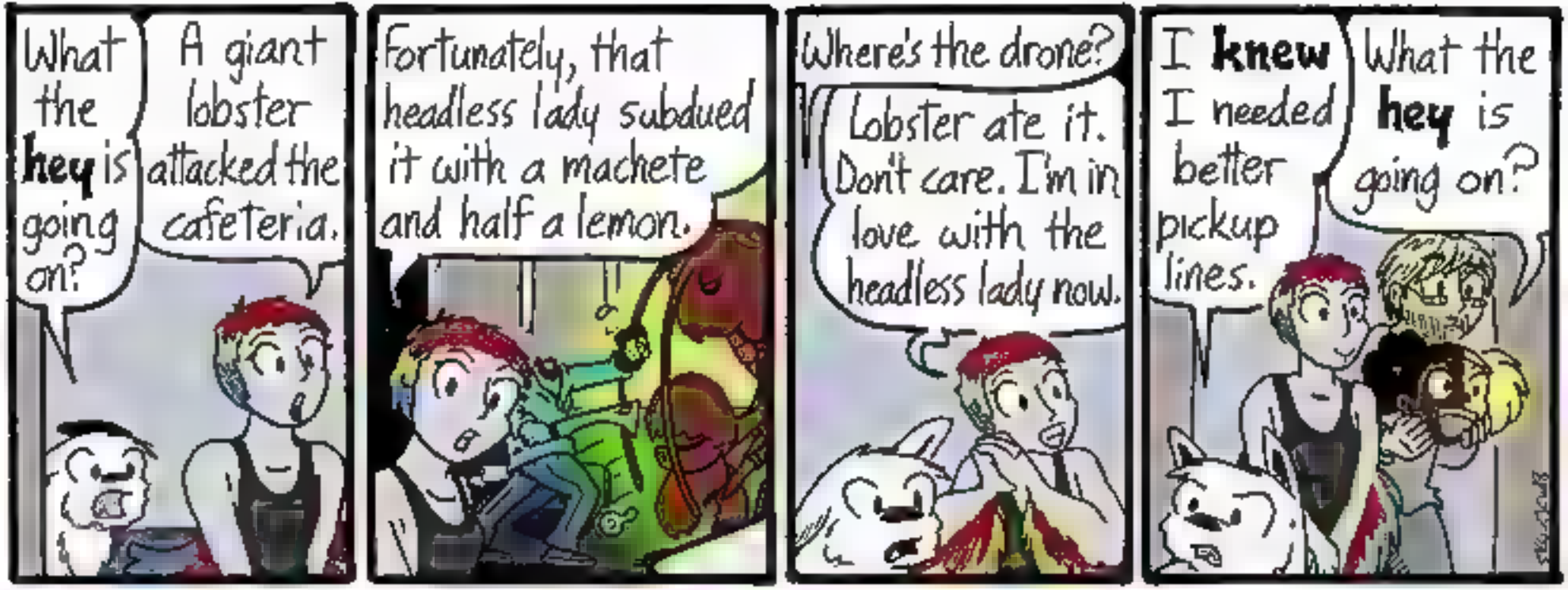

Fine. You're awesome at dates and I'm terrible.
That's not— Look, there's no trick to it. It's just dinner.
Let's go in and work **together** this time.
Your lobster.
KLAK
KLAK
FZZT
KLAK
Yeah, it'll take all of us to finish that thing.
Work the legs!
And for sir, the risotto.

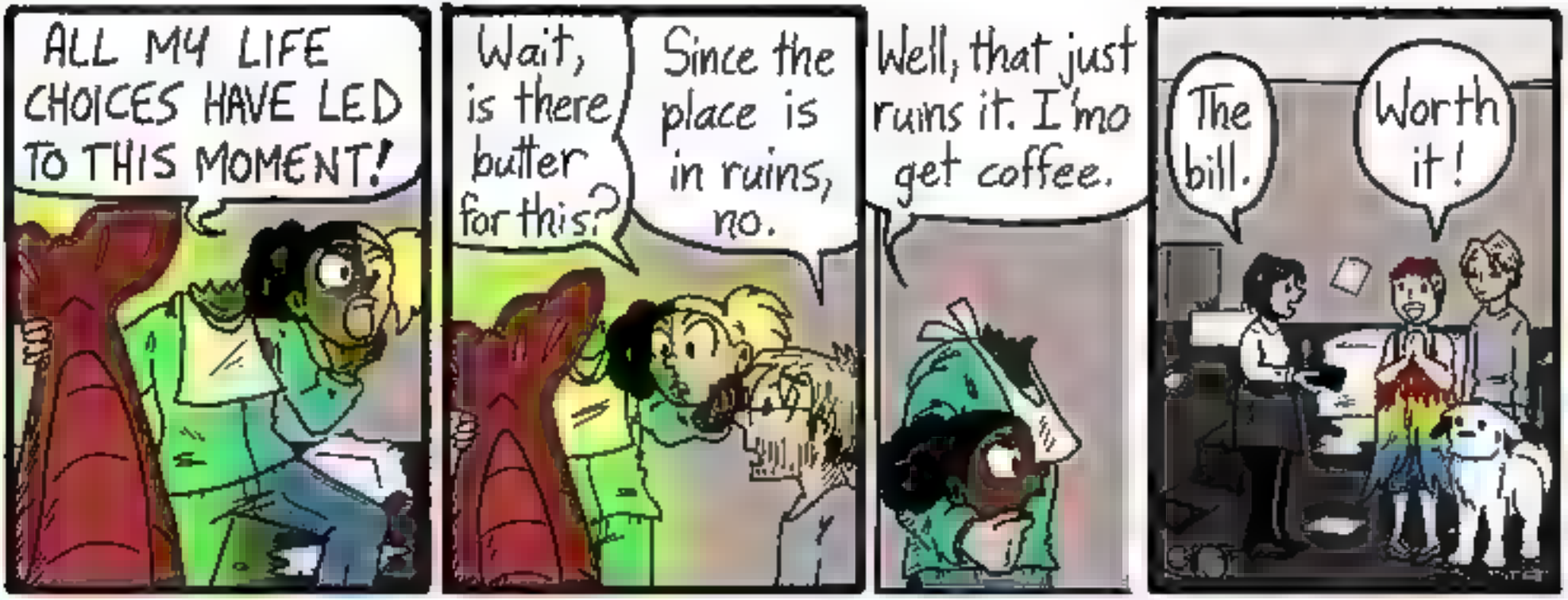

My lobster is bigger than I am!
Not bad for a workplace cafeteria, huh?
KLAK
KLAK
The whole staff is brain-glazed! Just run!
Left!
Right!
Left!
Right!
We're not moving.
Oops, sorry. I was wiggling the ears.

Hurry, best gestalt friend! The lobster is gaining on us!
fzzt
Oh, fer–
Oop!
Tap
You're welcome.
Holy crud, Nick.

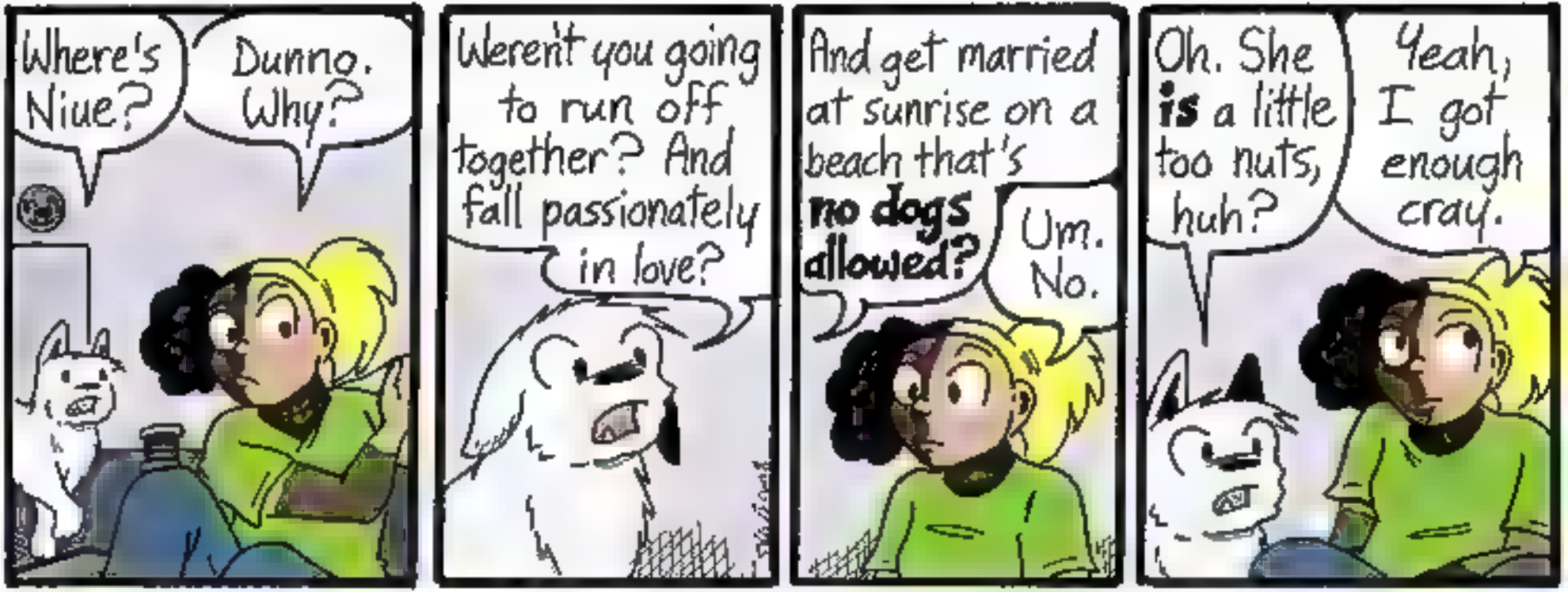

fzzt Sweetheart here. We have to stop that lobster.
How?
Tip's gun is at the table.
You brought a gun on a date? Have you lost your head?
THOOM
vmm
KRREEEE
Relatively speaking, no.
Ooo! New best friend!


"Tut tut, monsieur. Zee lobster ees a leetle too **fresh** today."
"May I recommend instead zee **huge laser rifle.**"
ZZAP
SKREE
Aw man! Nobody to appreciate my sweet lobster, burns.
How do you know what your body is doing downstairs?
Collarbone eye. **Super** useful.
I'd better go down there.


What the **hey** is going on?
A giant lobster attacked the cafeteria.
Fortunately, that headless lady subdued it with a machete and half a lemon.
Where's the drone?
Lobster ate it. Don't care. I'm in love with the headless lady now.
I **knew** I needed better pickup lines.
What the **hey** is going on?


ALL MY LIFE CHOICES HAVE LED TO THIS MOMENT!
Wait, is there butter for this?
Since the place is in ruins, no.
Well, that just ruins it. I'mo get coffee.
The bill.
Worth it!

Well, we certainly learned our lesson.
We did?
Giant lobsters don't care about privilege. They speak only the language of laser beams.
Also, I should stop that captive-bred hussy from stealing my girl.
What should I do?
Ahem.
sigh

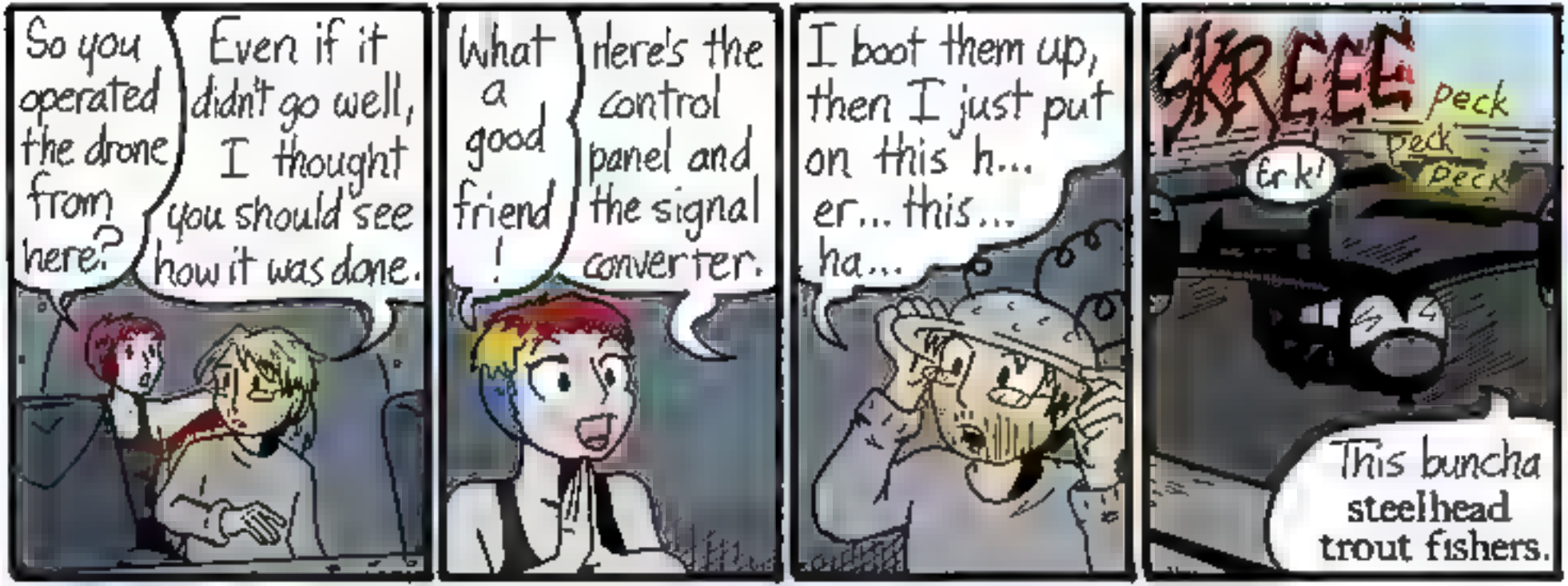

Where's Niue?
Dunno. Why?
Weren't you going to run off together? And fall passionately in love?
And get married at sunrise on a beach that's **no dogs allowed?**
Um. No.
Oh. She **is** a little too nuts, huh?
Yeah, I got enough cray.

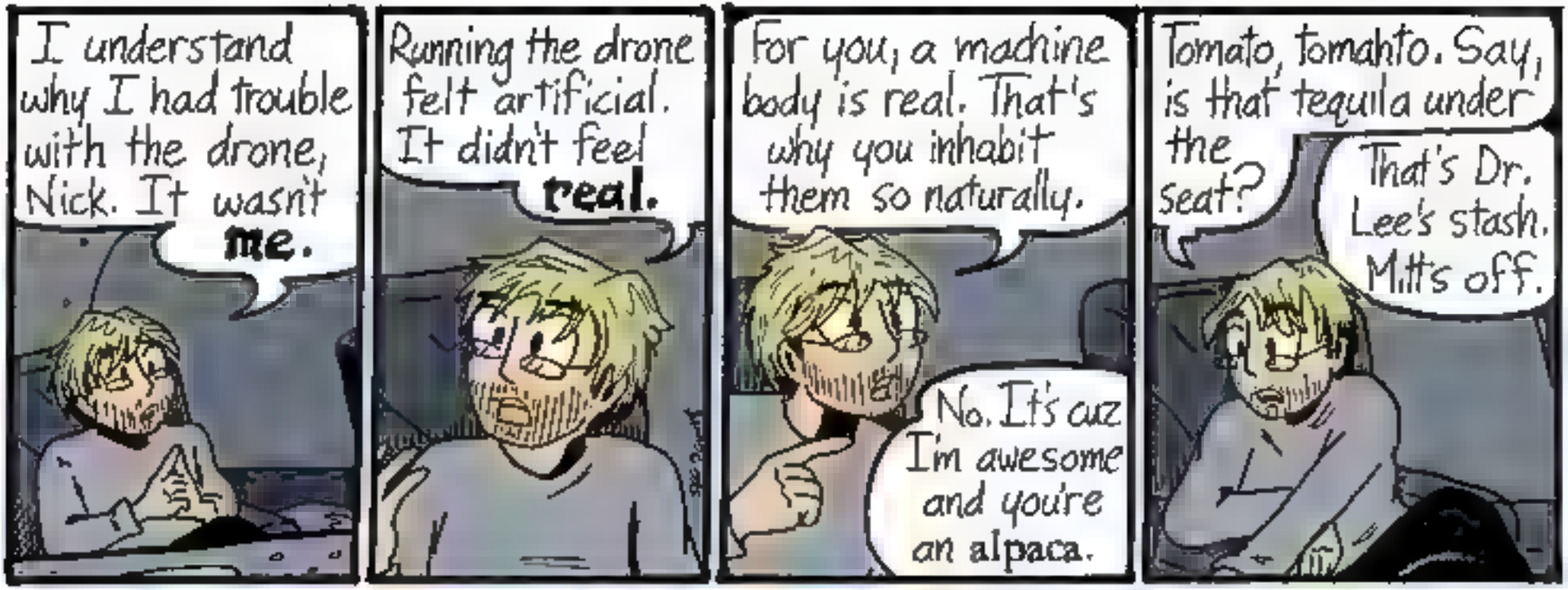
I admit it. The date with Niue was a terrible idea.
Not gonna argue.
The drones aren't ready, and they aren't a solution. They're a distraction.
Now that I know that, I'm ready for a real date. With you.
Just as soon as I get into another drone.
Dagnabbit, babe!

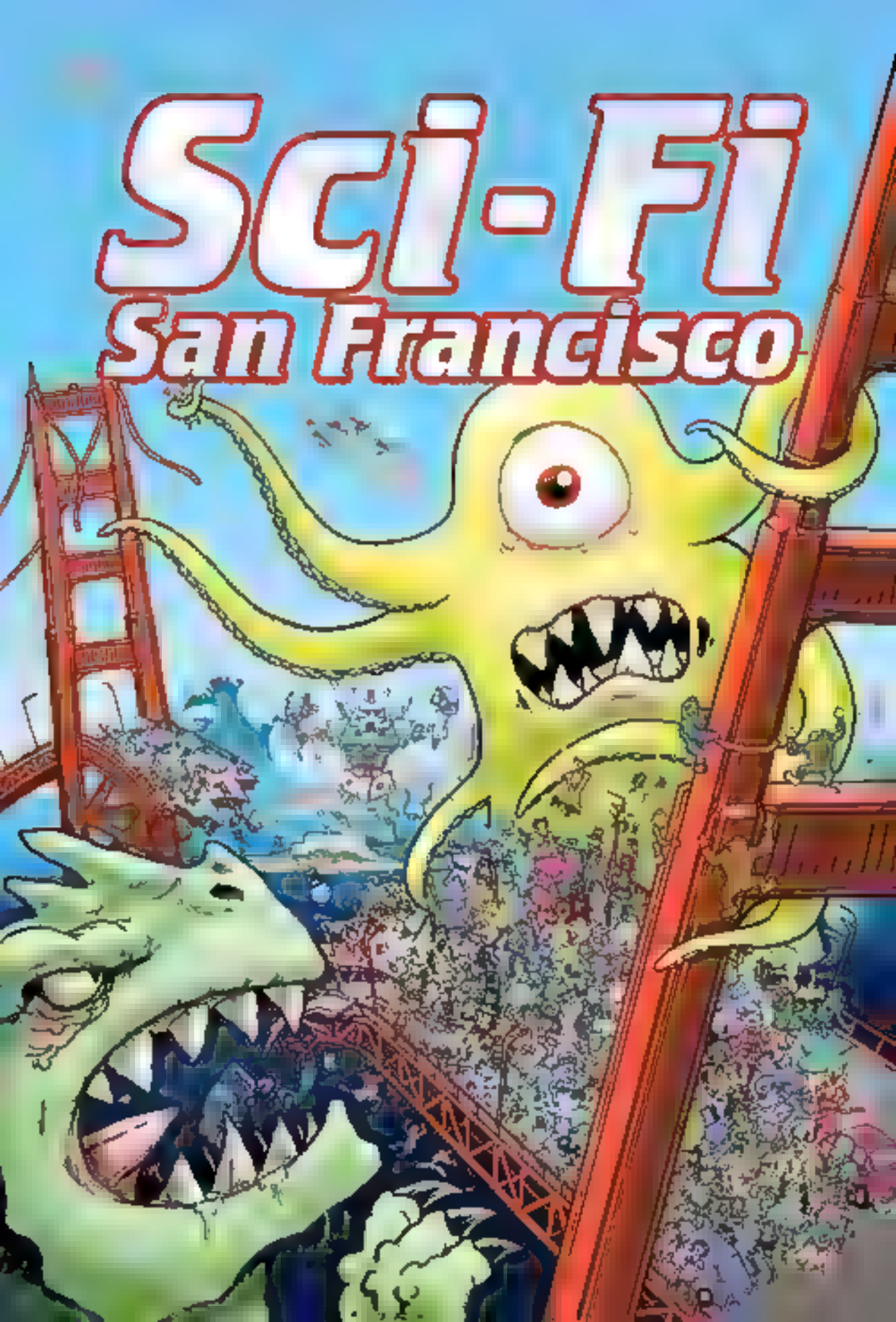
I just thought you'd... prefer a drone.
I mean... you dated Bubbles...
Babe, are you for serious?
That's why you got psyched about the drones? You think I wanna date robots?
And instead of ask me you get into a whole fake date with a fake body and someone else?
Yes! Are you still on brains?
Sometimes you're such a goof even I can be the smart one.

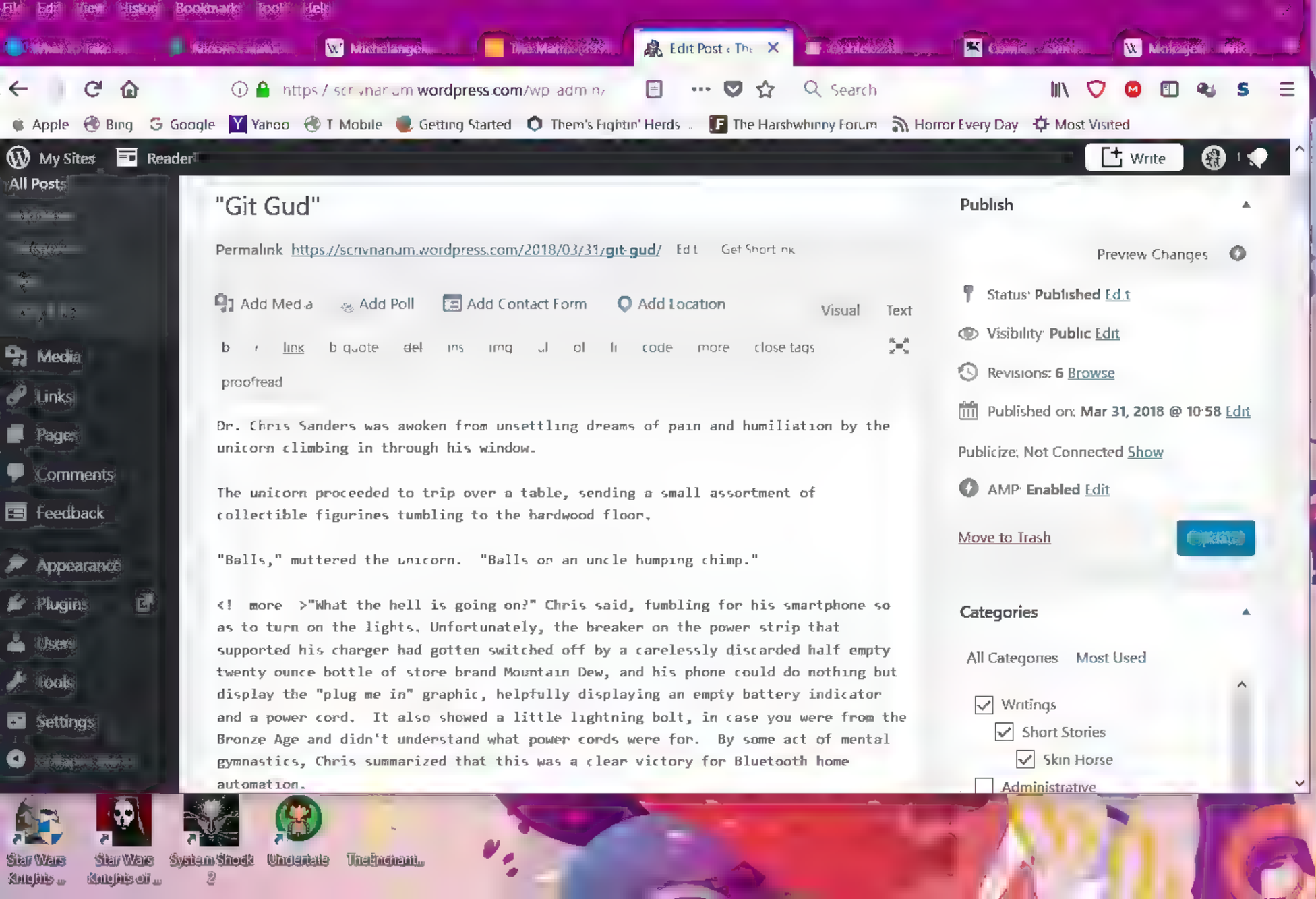
I'm sorry, Unity.
I don't know if that's enough. Tell me **why** you're sorry.
I'm sorry I prioritized a pretend date over ours.
And... I'm sorry I used to crab about your love life rather than admit I was jealous.
And one time I stepped on a grape at Trader Joe's and didn't pay for it...
Okay, that might be enough.

I don't suppose it'll surprise you that we're rejecting the drone plan.
It's just as well.
Dressing up as humans isn't the way. We have to be what we really are, whatever the world thinks.
Finally we agree.
Then you'll support my new romance with my zombie partner.
No, honestly that's a little too weird.
Don't care! Getting real!


So you operated the drone from here?
Even if it didn't go well, I thought you should see how it was done.
What a good friend!
Here's the control panel and the signal converter.
I boot them up, then I just put on this h... er... this... ha...
SKREEE
Peck
Peck
Peck
Erk!
This buncha steelhead trout fishers.


I understand why I had trouble with the drone, Nick. It wasn't me.
Running the drone felt artificial. It didn't feel real.
For you, a machine body is real. That's why you inhabit them so naturally.
No. It's cuz I'm awesome and you're an alpaca.
Tomato, tomahto. Say, is that tequila under the seat?
That's Dr. Lee's stash. Mitts off.


Sci-Fi
San Francisco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Add Poll
Add Contact Form
Add Location
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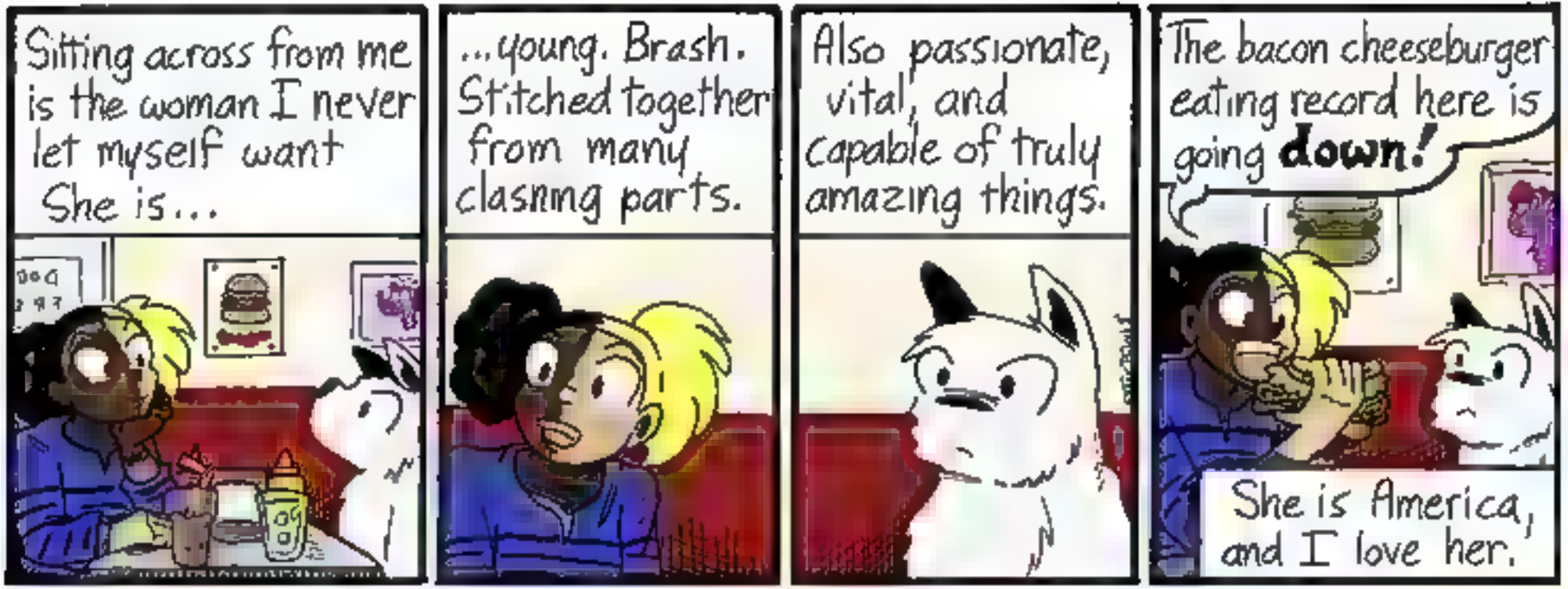
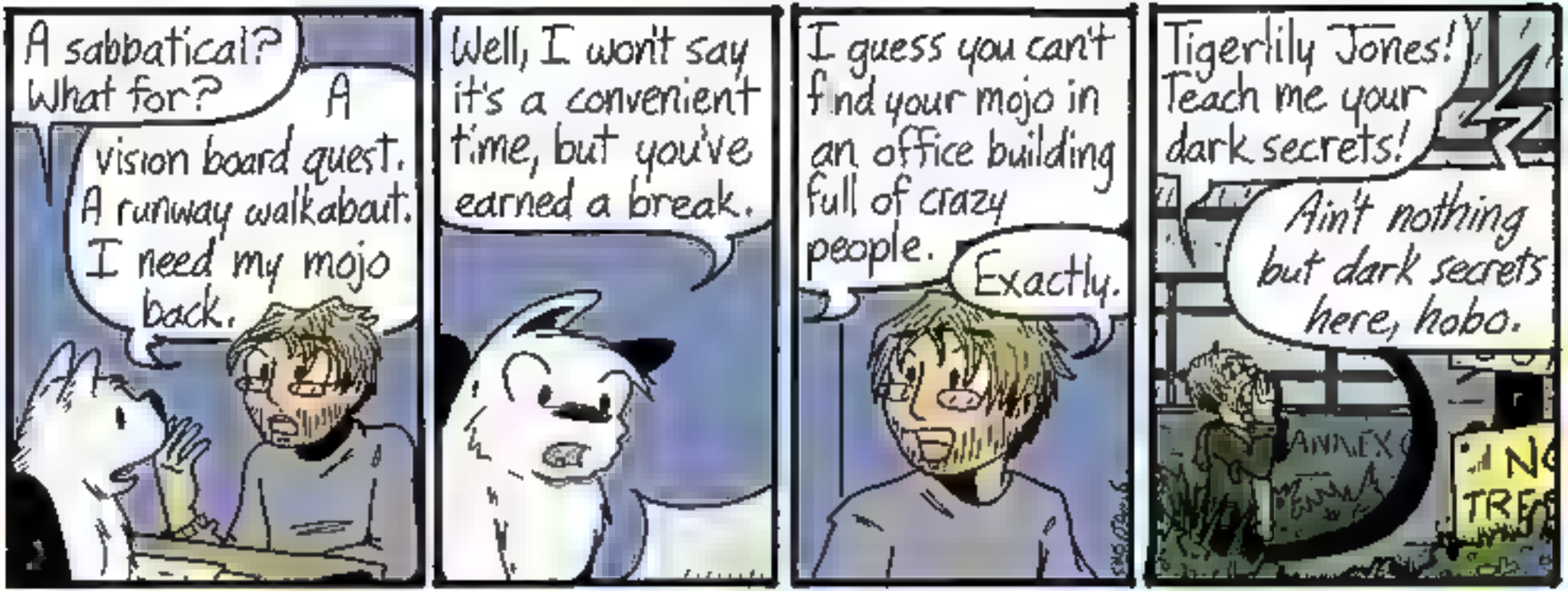
b i link b quote del ins img ul ol li code more close tags
proofread
Dr. Chris Sanders was awoken from unsettling dreams of pain and humiliation by the unicorn climbing in through his window.
The unicorn proceeded to trip over a table, sending a small assortment of collectible figurines tumbling to the hardwood floor.
"Balls," muttered the unicorn. "Balls or an uncle humping chimp."
<! more >"What the hell is going on?" Chris said, fumbling for his smartphone so as to turn on the lights. Unfortunately, the breaker on the power strip that supported his charger had gotten switched off by a carelessly discarded half empty twenty ounce bottle of store brand Mountain Dew, and his phone could do nothing but display the "plug me in" graphic, helpfully displaying an empty battery indicator and a power cord. It also showed a little lightning bolt, in case you were from the Bronze Age and didn't understand what power cords were for. By some act of mental gymnastics, Chris summarized that this was a clear victory for Bluetooth home automation.
Publish
Preview Changes
Status: Published Edit
Visibility: Public Edit
Revisions: 6 Browse
Published on: Mar 31, 2018 @ 10:58 Edit
Publicize: Not Connected Show
AMP: Enabled Edit
Move to Trash
Categories
All Categories
Most Used
Writings
Short Stories
Skin Horse
Administrative
Star Wars Knights ...
Star Wars Knights of ...
System Shock 2
Undertale
TheEnchant...

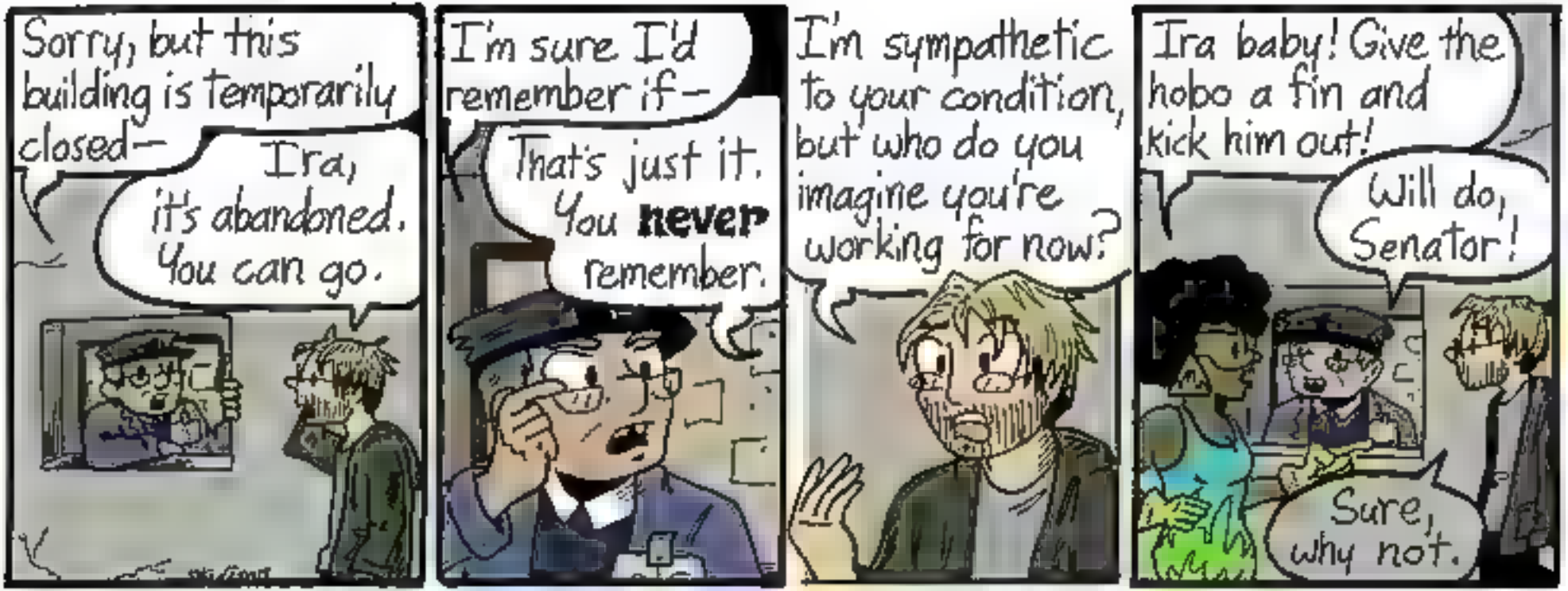

Sitting across from me is the woman I never let myself want She is...
...young. Brash. Stitched together from many clashing parts.
Also passionate, vital, and capable of truly amazing things.
The bacon cheeseburger eating record here is going down!
She is America, and I love her.

There! I walked you home. That's a date thing, right?
Babe, we live in the exact same place.
So, um, what happens next?
Dunno. I'll check the rulebook.
There's a rulebook? And nobody told me?
Yeah sure. I'll fish it out.
This is an omnibus of Hot Goblin Brotherhoods #1-7.
Hey, I found half a Snickers too!

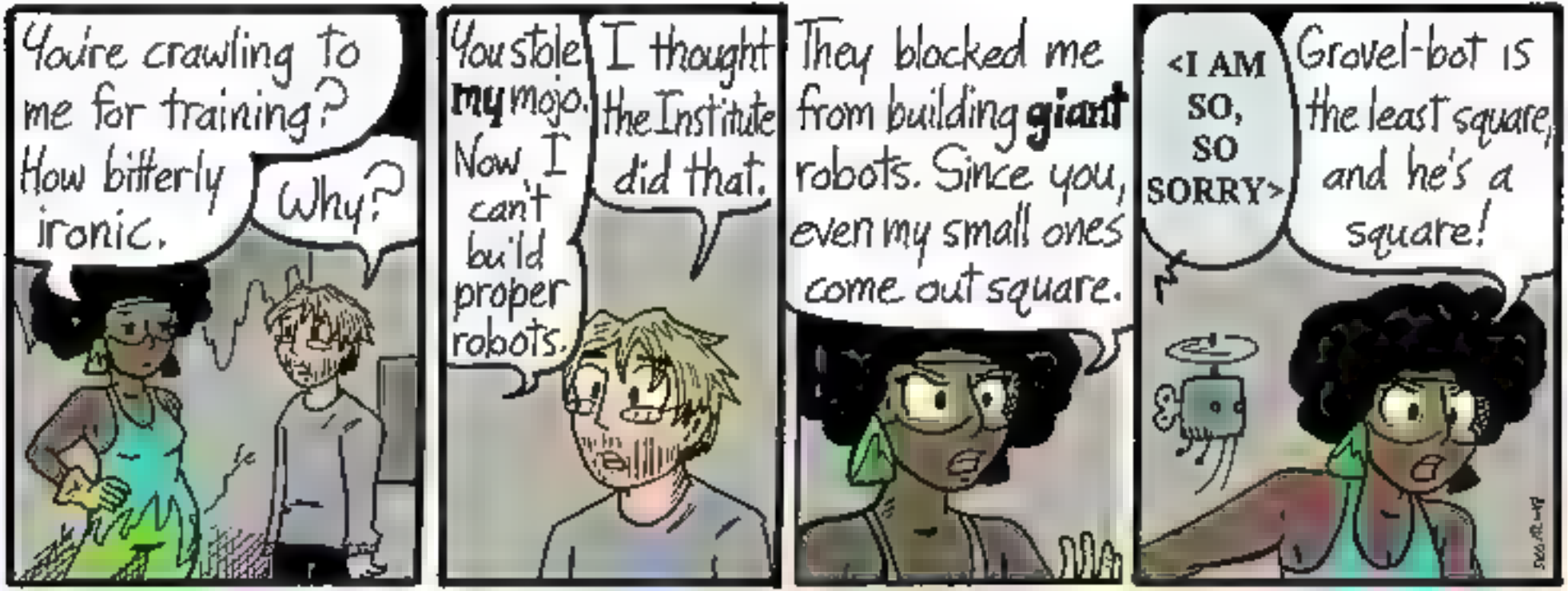
Night's not over yet, babe.
What do you mean?
You'n me are gonna go in and do some you-know-what.
But... it's so noisy, and it makes a mess...
You know you want to.
Yes. Yes I do.
I can just make it to the end table!
Careful! That whole area is lava!

It's nice to see you in such a good mood.
Oh? Is it?
Because the air sings with hope and possibility wherever I go?
Because I stand before you a new dog, open to the world and its wonders?
That, and I'm requesting time off.
New dog, same requirement to file in triplicate.

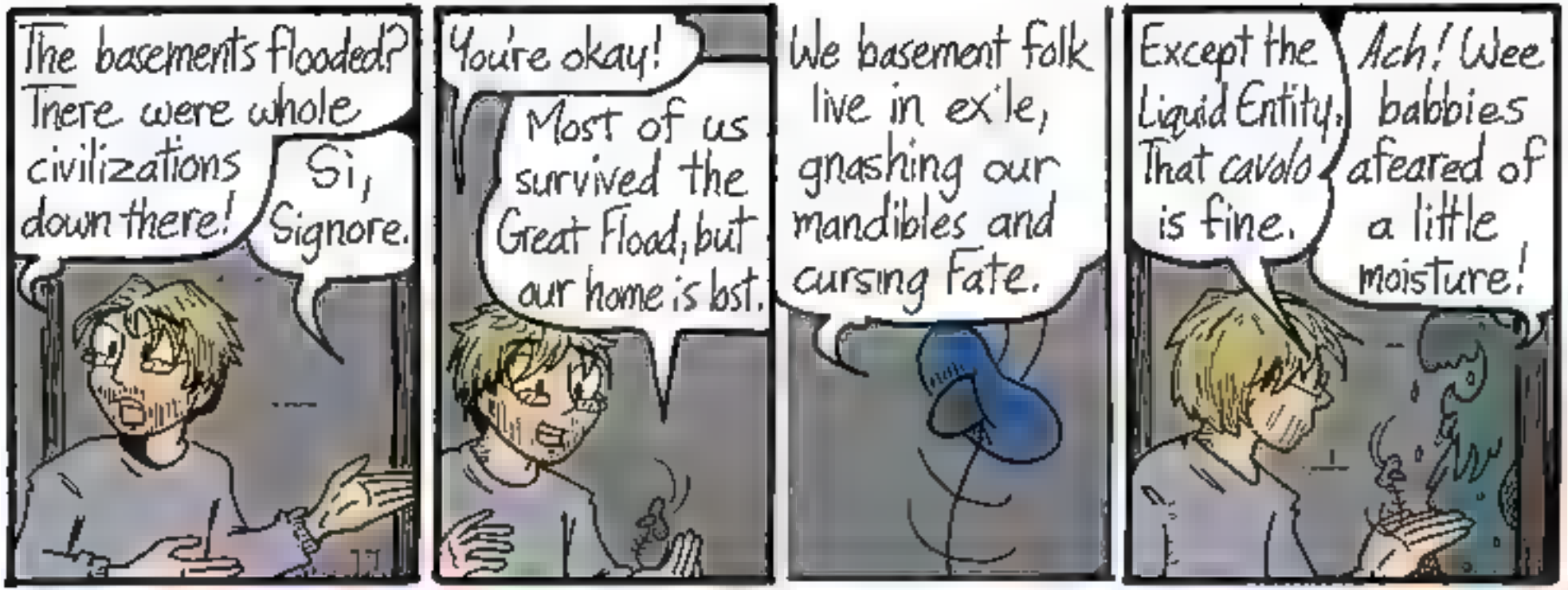

A sabbatical? What for?
A vision board quest. A runway walkabout. I need my mojo back.
Well, I won't say it's a convenient time, but you've earned a break.
I guess you can't find your mojo in an office building full of crazy people.
Exactly.
Tigerlily Jones! Teach me your dark secrets!
Ain't nothing but dark secrets here, hobo.
ANNEX

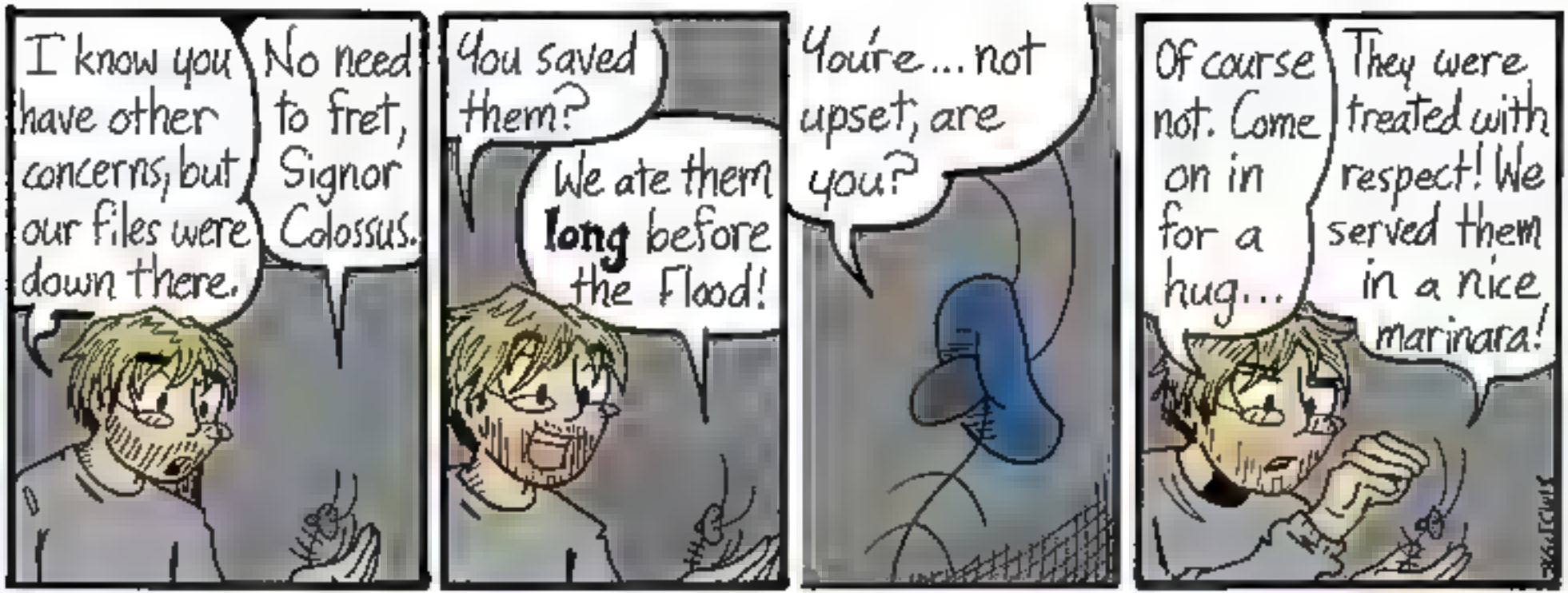

Sorry, but this building is temporarily closed—
Ira, it's abandoned. You can go.
I'm sure I'd remember if—
That's just it. You never remember.
I'm sympathetic to your condition, but who do you imagine you're working for now?
Ira baby! Give the hobo a fin and kick him out!
Will do, Senator!
Sure, why not.

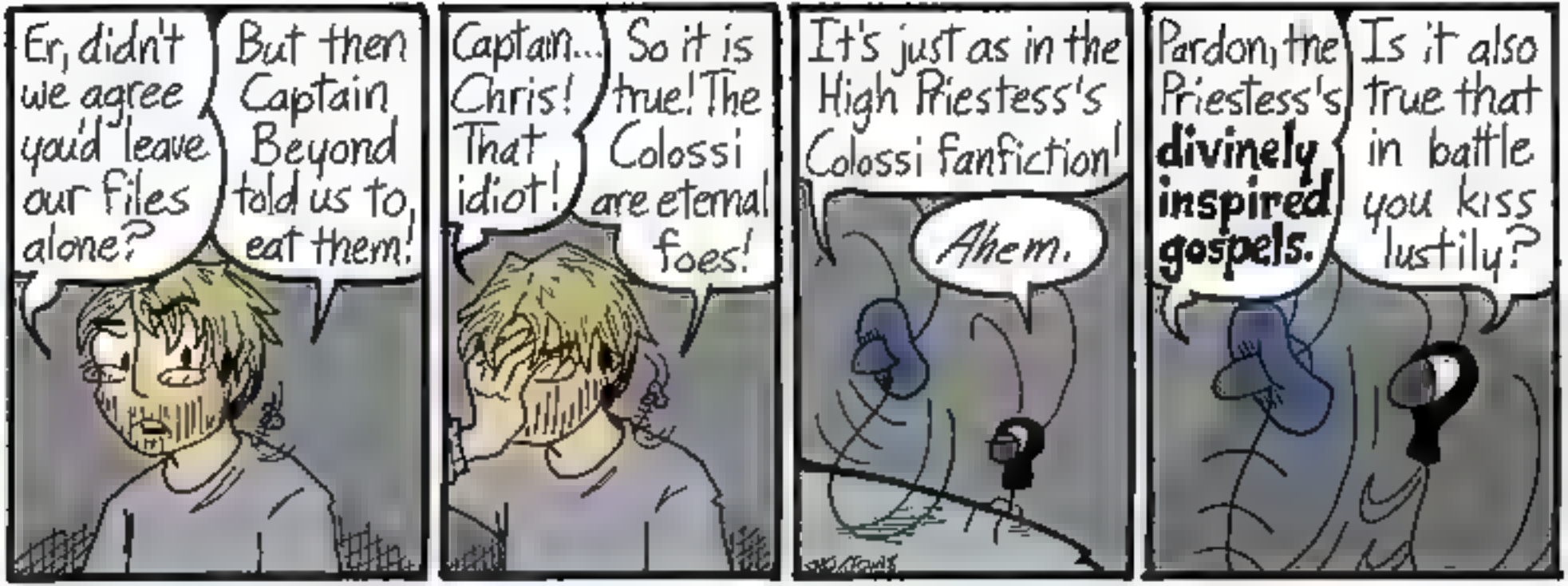
Wilkin? What brought you so low?
I sacrificed identity for influence! And somehow lost both!
This is the most broken soul I ever did see.
I need guidance from someone who's never compromised.
I'll do anything
Anything.
Quit the Fed and join my funkadelic new order.
Okay, see, but I've got a pension.
We've got halter tops. Choose your side.


You're crawling to me for training? How bitterly ironic.
Why?
You stole my mojo. Now I can't build proper robots.
I thought the Institute did that.
They blocked me from building giant robots. Since you, even my small ones come out square.
<I AM SO, SO SORRY>
Grovel-bot is the least square, and he's a square!

For training, I'll assign you menial tasks grooving with secret wisdom.
Like in "The Karate Kid"?
I don't acknowledge pop culture refs from the Funkless Decade. To start, the basement's damp.
Ah. I can fix a leak.
<I'LL FETCH A PAPER TOWEL>
Thanks, Gravel-bot. That'll be helpful.

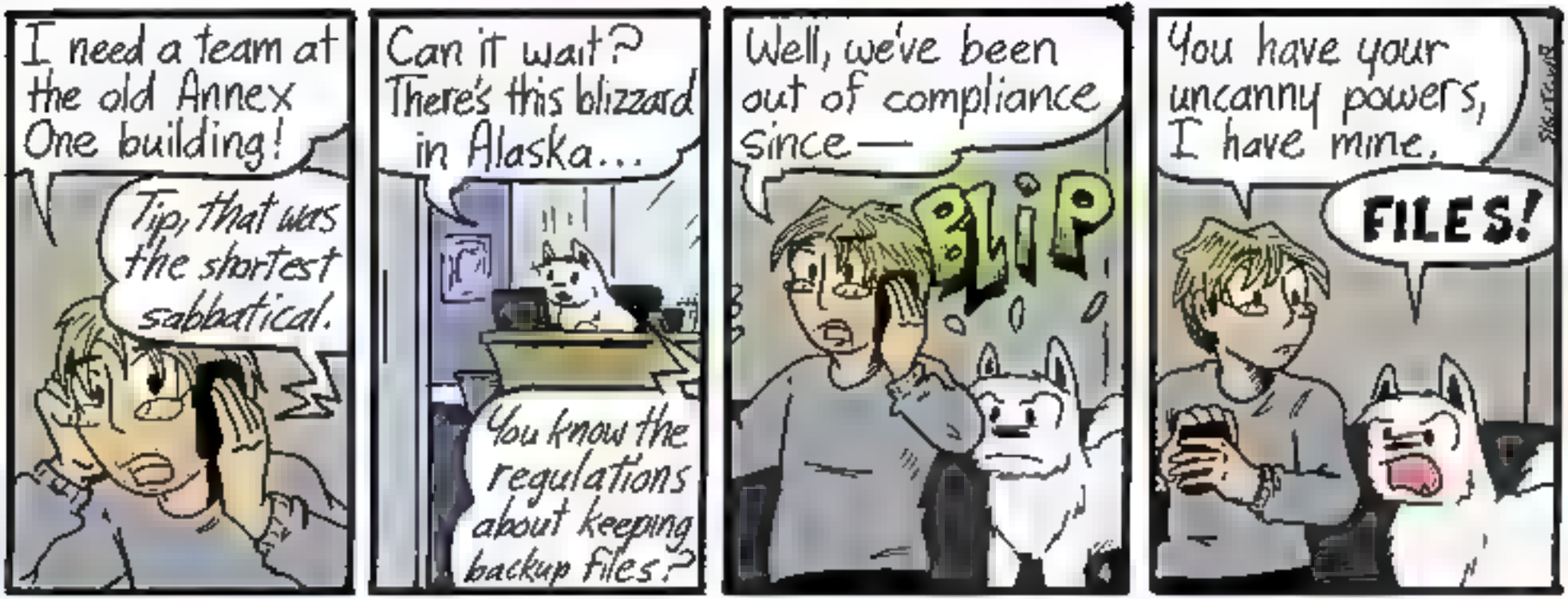

The basements flooded? There were whole civilizations down there!
Sì, Signore.
You're okay!
Most of us survived the Great Flood, but our home is lost.
We basement folk live in ex'le, gnashing our mandibles and cursing Fate.
Except the Liquid Entity. That cavolo is fine.
Ach! Wee babbies afeared of a little moisture!

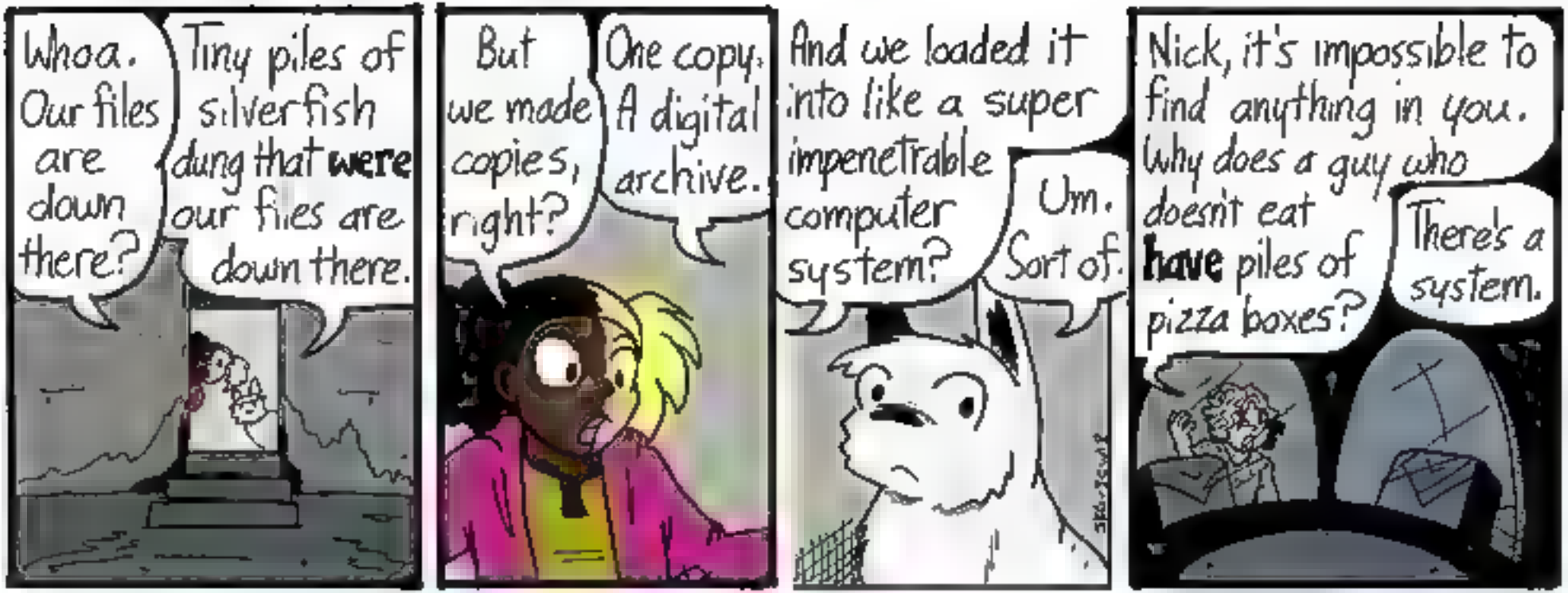

I know you have other concerns, but our files were down there.
No need to fret, Signor Colossus.
You saved them?
We ate them long before the Flood!
You're... not upset, are you?
Of course not. Come on in for a hug...
They were treated with respect! We served them in a nice marinara!

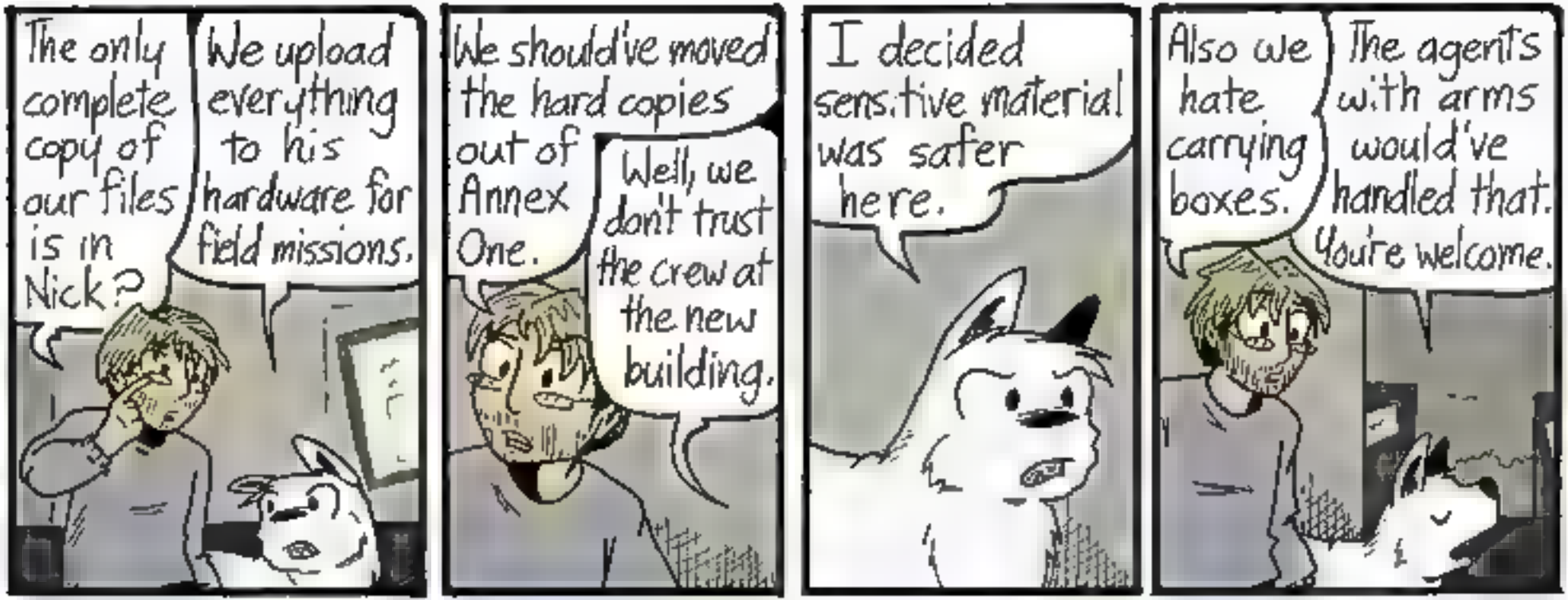

Er, didn't we agree you'd leave our files alone?
But then Captain Beyond told us to eat them!
Captain... Chris! That idiot!
So it is true! The Colossi are eternal foes!
It's just as in the High Priestess's Colossi fanfiction!
Ahem.
Pardon, the Priestess's divinely inspired gospels.
Is it also true that in battle you kiss lustily?

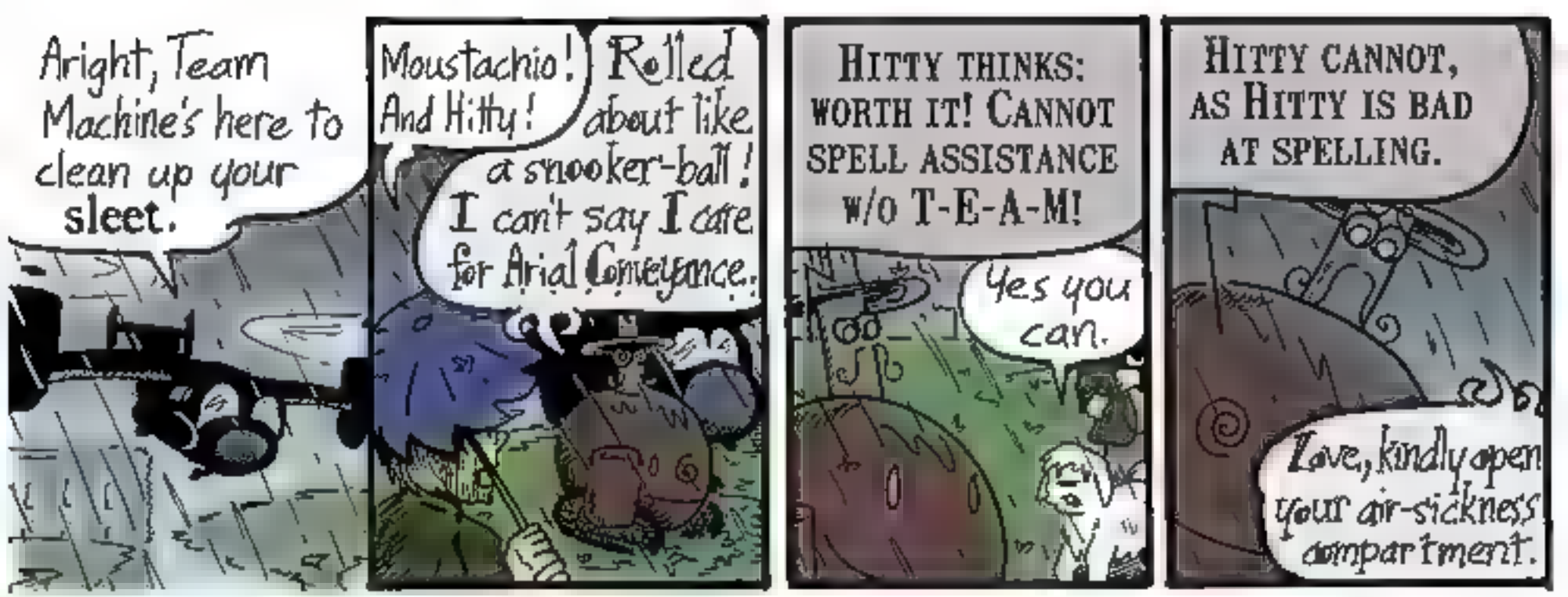
TUPERMAN
The Meanest Man in the World
(he eats buildings)
YUM YUM YUM!
STOP EATING BUILDINGS, TUPERMAN!
OH NO! IT'S SUPERMAN!
The Man Inside Tuperman

I have to put training on hold.
Already bugging out, huh?
It's not like that. I need to help the basement dwellers.
The whom?
Haven't you noticed the civilization in your basement?
Oh, the crystal brothers? We're cool.
CAN YOU FEEL THE FUNK?
TO OUR VERY CORE
PLEASE STOP


I need a team at the old Annex One building!
Tip, that was the shortest sabbatical.
Can it wait? There's this blizzard in Alaska...
You know the regulations about keeping backup files?
Well, we've been out of compliance since—
BLIP
You have your uncanny powers, I have mine.
FILES!

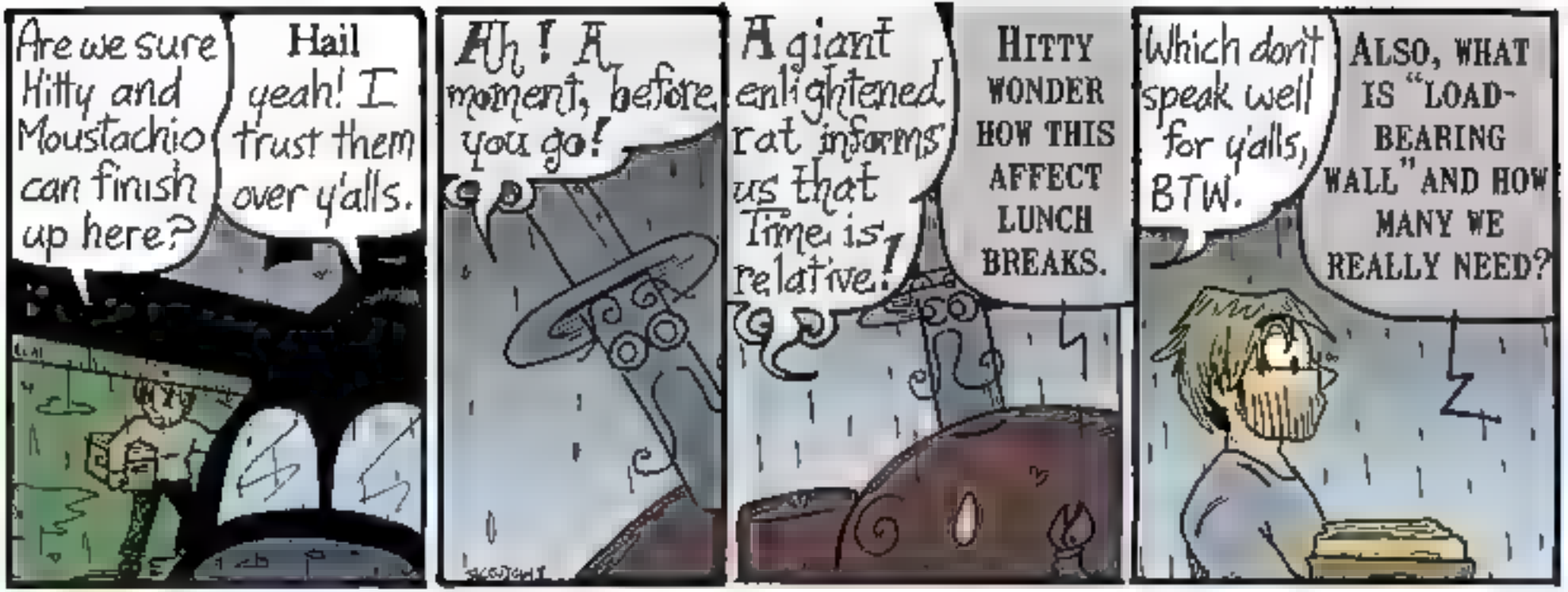

Whoa. Our files are down there?
Tiny piles of silverfish dung that were our files are down there.
But we made copies, right?
One copy. A digital archive.
And we loaded it into like a super impenetrable computer system?
Um. Sort of.
Nick, it's impossible to find anything in you. Why does a guy who doesn't eat have piles of pizza boxes?
There's a system.


The only complete copy of our files is in Nick?
We upload everything to his hardware for field missions.
We should've moved the hard copies out of Annex One.
Well, we don't trust the crew at the new building.
I decided sensitive material was safer here.
Also we hate carrying boxes.
The agents with arms would've handled that. You're welcome.


Aright, Team Machine's here to clean up your sleet.
Moustachio! And Hitty!
Rolled about like a snooker-ball! I can't say I care for Arial Conveyance.
HITTY THINKS: WORTH IT! CANNOT SPELL ASSISTANCE W/O T-E-A-M!
Yes you can.
HITTY CANNOT, AS HITTY IS BAD AT SPELLING.
Love, kindly open your air-sickness compartment.

Nasty spot of weather on the way over.
If you want to dry off, stay out of the basement
You can sort through the detritus in our old office.
O BOY! SPACE HEATERS!
You found the fusion reactors Gavotte was collecting.
U.S.
YES! SO VERY COZY!
On second thought, stay out of everything ever.
IT OKAY! HITTY POWERED BY UNSTABLE FUSION REACTOR TOO!
U.S.

Let's get the basement folks sorted. Then we have to get up north.
Your old pack?
Yeah, we're getting urgent calls from Paradise. Some kind of blizzard.
Sounds like shenanigans.
Sure the emergency ain't "boss wants to show off her girlfriend to the family"?
Nick! That would be silly!
As silly as Sparkle's face when she sees how self-actualized I am.
Yeah, this is worth icing and dying for.

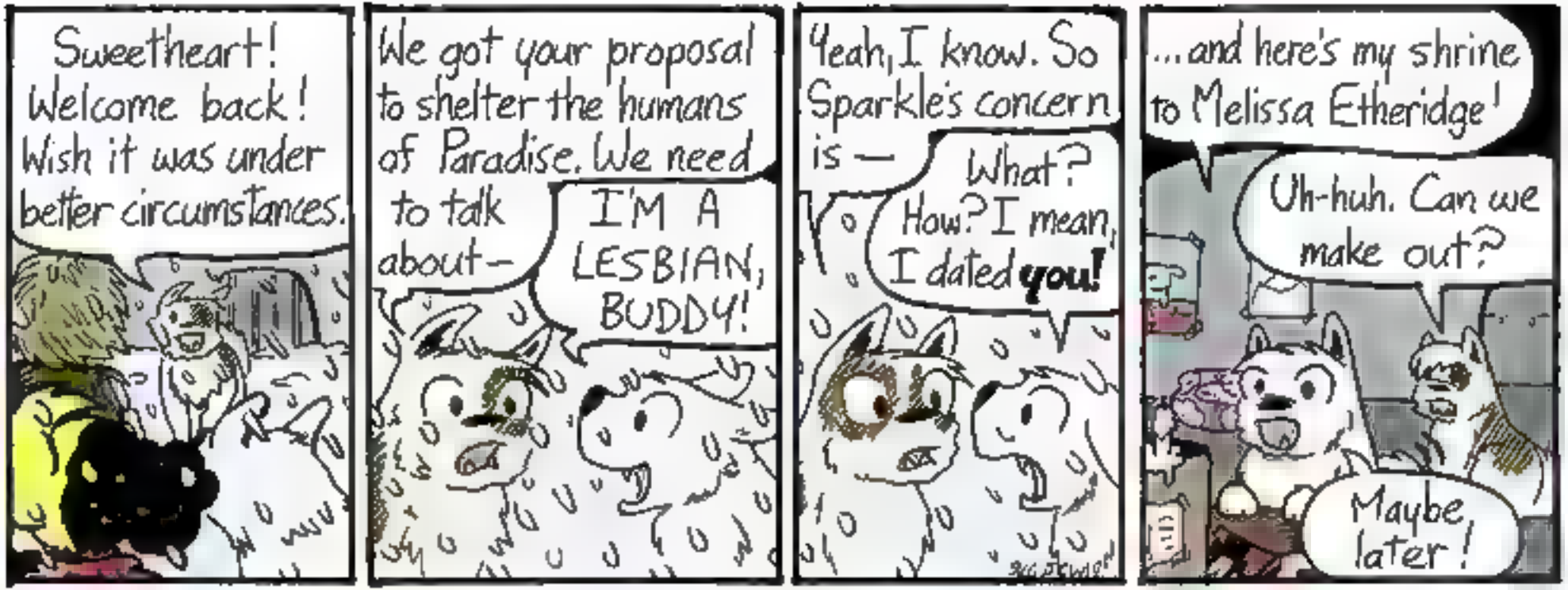

Are we sure Hitty and Moustachio can finish up here?
Hail yeah! I trust them over y'alls.
Ah! A moment, before you go!
A giant enlightened rat informs us that Time is relative!
HITTY WONDER HOW THIS AFFECT LUNCH BREAKS.
Which don't speak well for y'alls, BTW.
ALSO, WHAT IS "LOAD-BEARING WALL" AND HOW MANY WE REALLY NEED?

Oh, hi, giant enlightened rat.
You did well to aid the basement peoples.
It's our job. My issues can wait.
Here. We dredged this from the flood.
This. . .this is one of my old earrings.
Take it, and remember transcendence is in your grasp.
Sorry, missed that. I was admiring myself with this earring on.
Or within throwing distance.

I'll be back after this mission.
When will you learn? The Man will always try to lure you from the Funk.
I'm sorry, but if I have to choose between "the funk" and doing some good, my choice is clear.
You can be funky and good!
You once tore the roof off a Goodwill to steal a mohair dress.
I was speaking in the hypothetical.

Your guests are leaving already?
They'll be back. We'd best prepare.
That hobo cracker is risking it all for some dog cats. For once I want to create something meaningful.
Such as ...?
The funkiest party since the Age of the Pyramids!
I'll order balloons and cocktail wienies!
You be your square self, Ira.

Feeling nostalgic, Nick? Alaska was your first Skin Horse mission!
Oh, the time I crashed and broke a humid rotor?
Now we're flying into another blizzard, with a buncha dogs to guide us down
Those are my people you're talking about.
BEEP
Skin Horse, you are cleared for STRANGER STRANGER HOLY CRUD CALM DOWN IT'S NOT THE MAILMAN landing.
Ah, it's good to be home.
Prep your butts for sniffing.

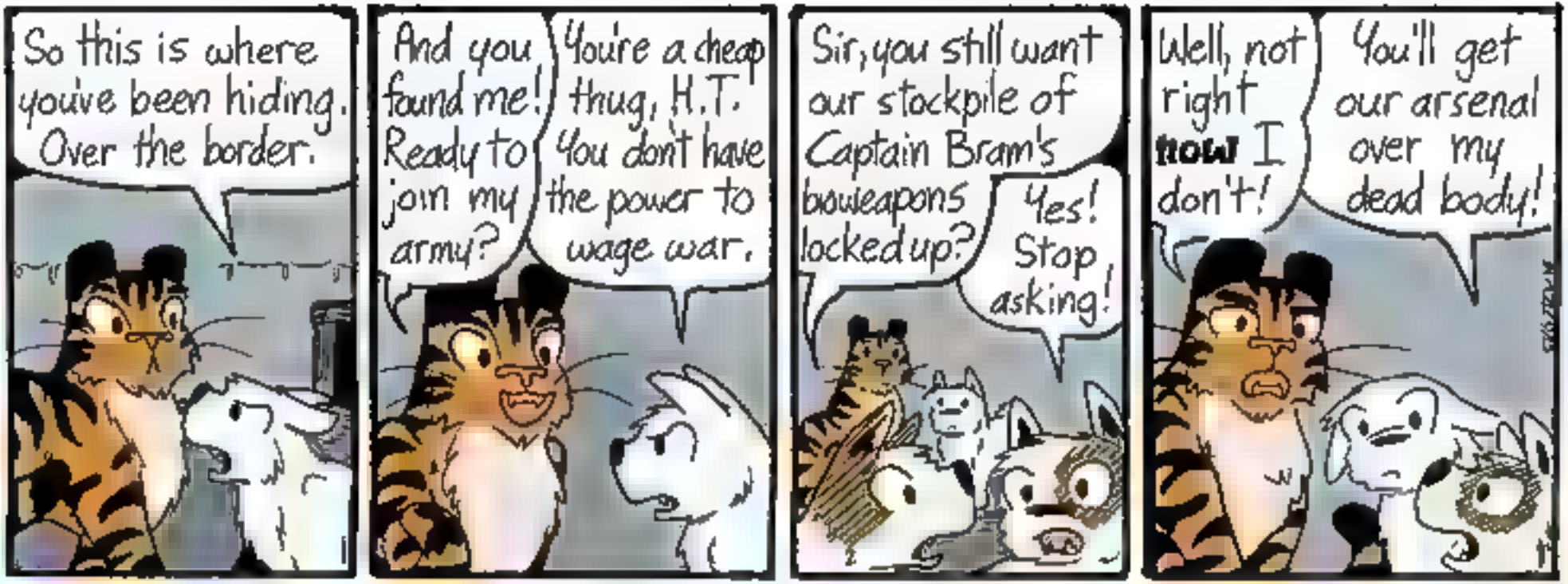

Sweetheart! Welcome back! Wish it was under better circumstances.
We got your proposal to shelter the humans of Paradise. We need to talk about—
I'M A LESBIAN, BUDDY!
Yeah, I know. So Sparkle's concern is—
What? How? I mean, I dated you!
...and here's my shrine to Melissa Etheridge!
Uh-huh. Can we make out?
Maybe, later!

THE ZOMBIE GNOME DEFENSE GUIDE

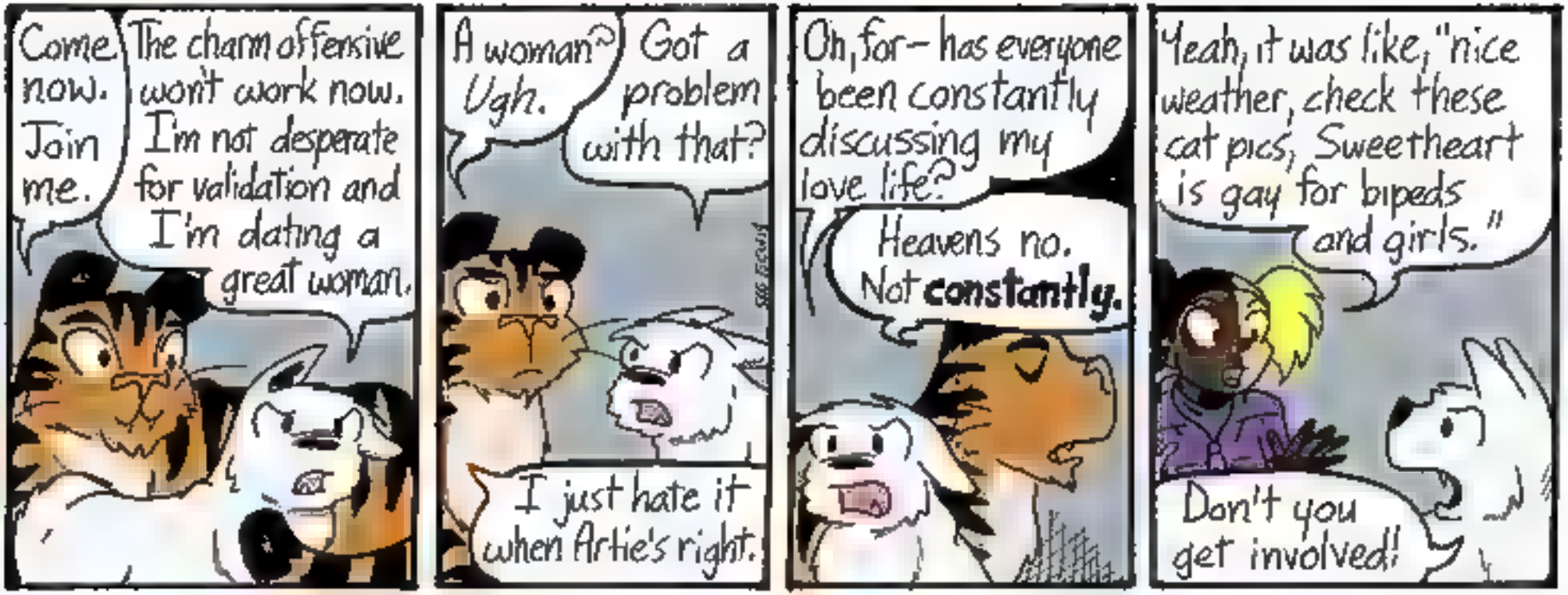
A COMPLETE REFERENCE TO SURVIVING THE TINIEST APOCALYPSE

Sparkle wants to know why we should take in these Americans.
Well, the humans of Paradise are special.
4
To stop the were-wolf plague, we injected them with Unity's essence. So they're all—
Babe! Help!
I found a thing and I dunno whether to punch it or eat it!
What is it?
I don't know!
Sparkle's question stands.
That's my girlfriend! Isn't she cute?

Sparkle's gotten more anti-human lately.
You two are still married, right?
It's complicated.
There's a new guy bending her ear. I feel a fight coming.
Buddy, you're terrible at fighting.
Any dog she brings in, do what you do best. Win him over with kindness.
Sweetheart! What a pleasant surprise!
OH FRIGGING DIE IN A FIRE ALREADY.


So this is where you've been hiding. Over the border.
And you found me! Ready to join my army?
You're a cheap thug, H.T. You don't have the power to wage war.
Sir, you still want our stockpile of Captain Bram's bioweapons locked up?
Yes! Stop asking!
Well, not right NOW I don't!
You'll get our arsenal over my dead body!

Upgrading from home-cooked bombs to bioweapons. Real nice.
The humans forced my paw.
You're crazy.
Crazy like a fox, perhaps. We're under attack and you know it.
All that's attacking you now is a blizzard. You've gone schizo-paranoid.
Schizo-paranoid like a fox, perhaps.
Sir, please do not disrespect fox culture.


Come now. Join me.
The charm offensive won't work now. I'm not desperate for validation and I'm dating a great woman.
A woman? Ugh.
Got a problem with that?
I just hate it when Artie's right.
Oh, for- has everyone been constantly discussing my love life?
Heavens no. Not constantly.
Yeah, it was like, "nice weather, check these cat pics, Sweetheart is gay for bipeds and girls."
Don't you get involved!

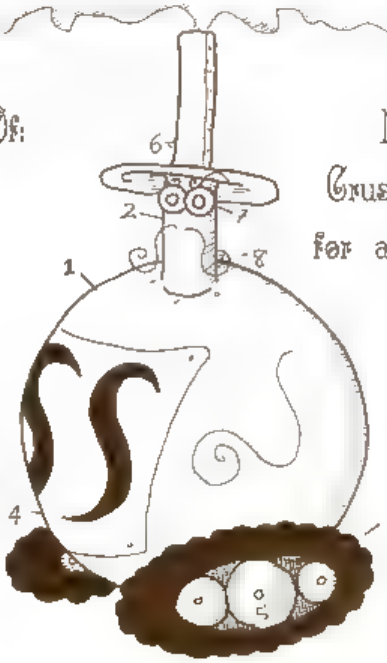
Recently Exhibited at the Crystal Palace

THE THINKONIUM

A Clockwork Mechanical Man

Fully Capable Of:

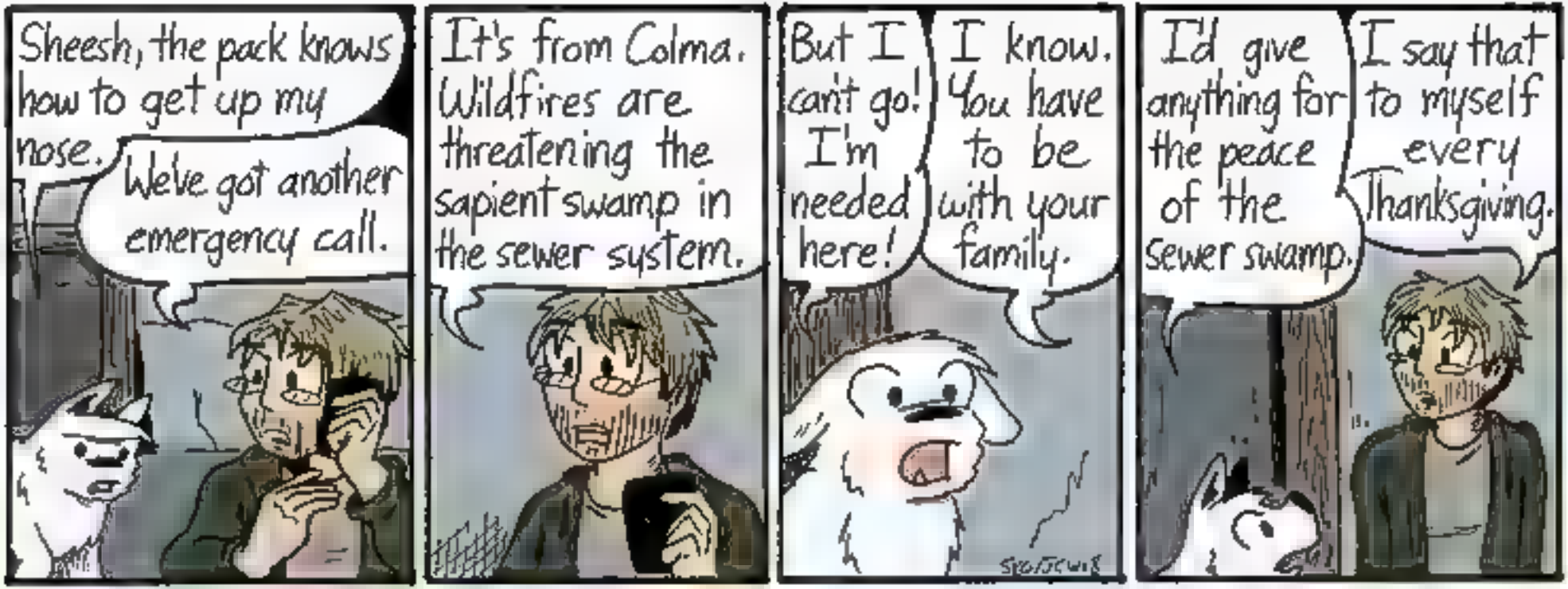
- Thinking
- Speaking
- Walking
- Action
- But Mostly Rampaging



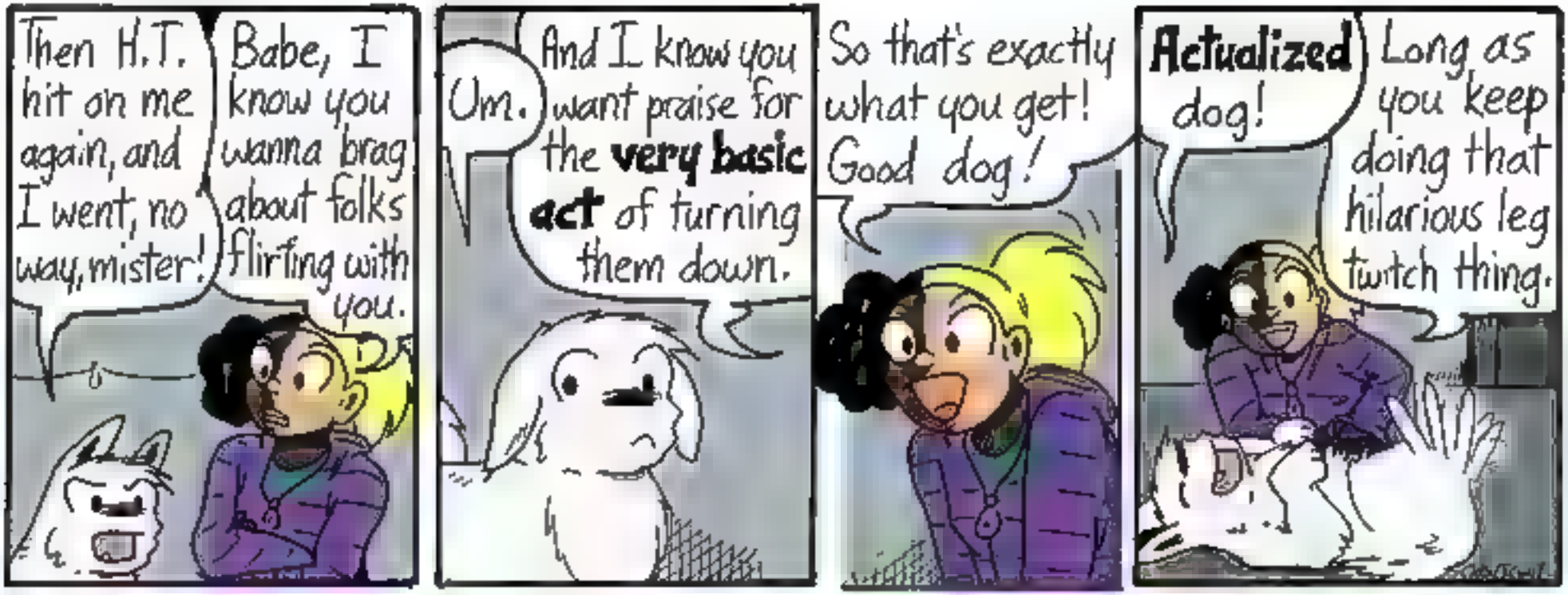
NB. Guaranteed to Crush the Unfortunate for a Thousand Years.

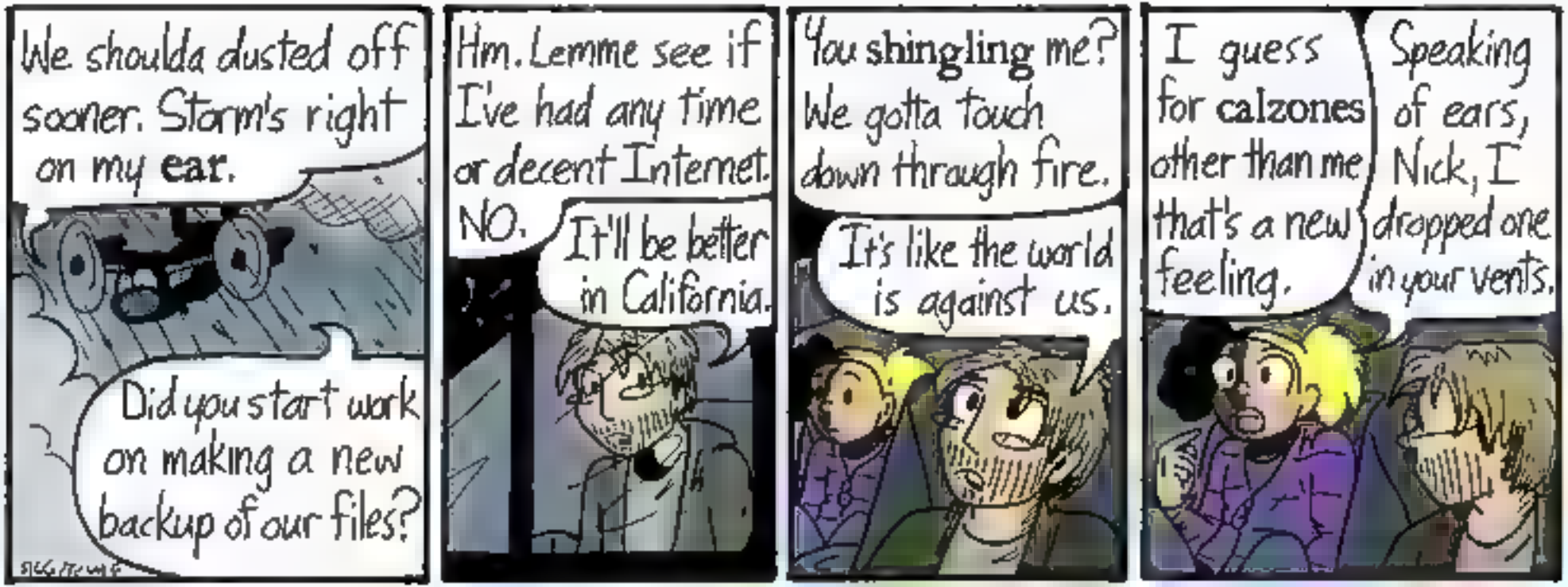
Manufactured Only by Prof Lupin Maddlebod. Serious Inquiries Only. Time-Wasters Will Be Ground Beneath Steel Treads.

Sparkle, you've got to kick H.T. out. He's a terrorist.
Why, Sweetheart. Nice to see you too.
I don't know what he's been telling you—
Quite a lot about the mess in the States.
We were created to conquer America, not be conquered. Not that a lap dog like you would understand.
Excuse me, but have you even noticed my self-actualization?
Is that what it is? I thought you rolled in something.

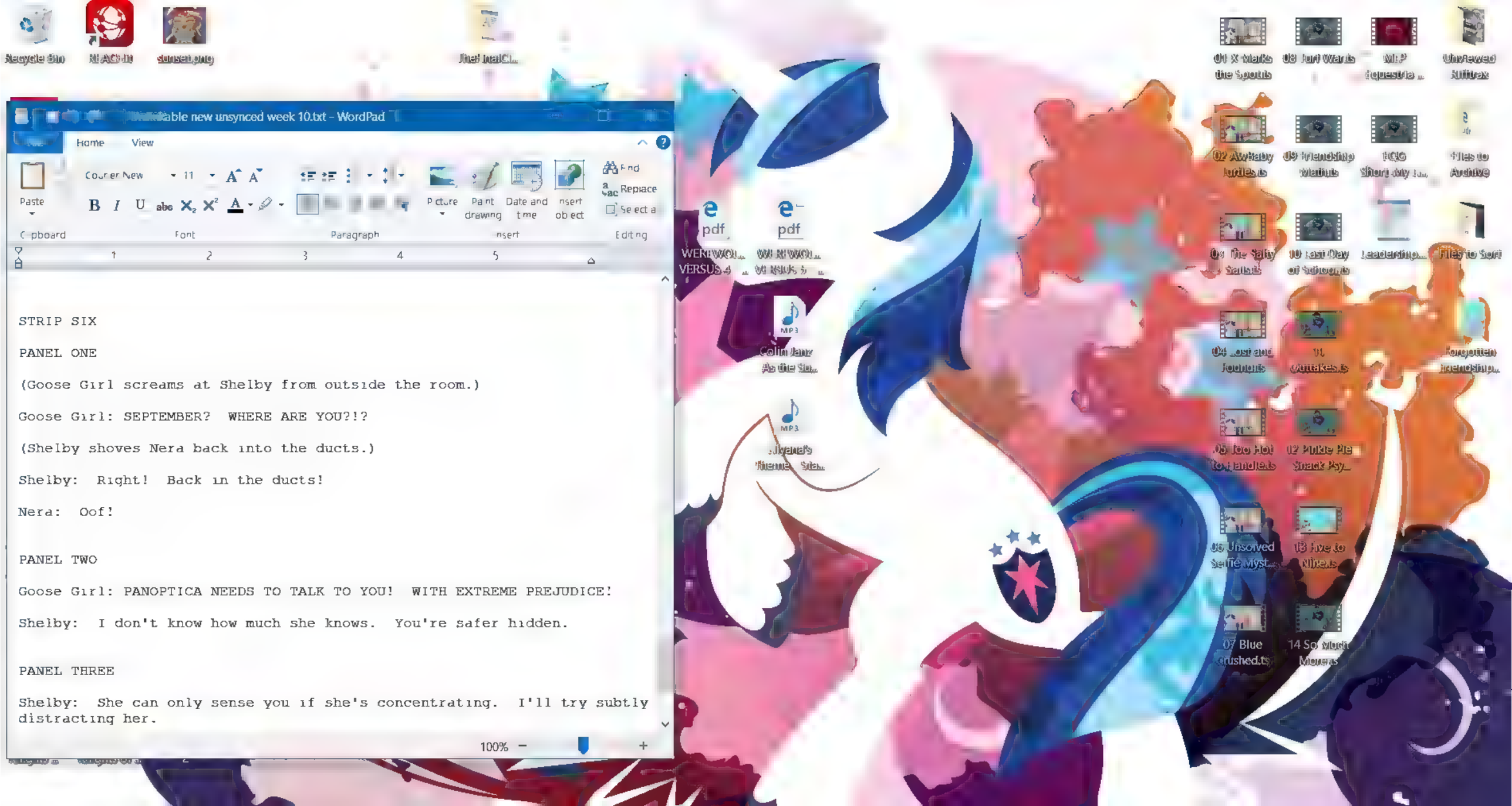

Sheesh, the pack knows how to get up my nose.
We've got another emergency call.
It's from Colma. Wildfires are threatening the sapient swamp in the sewer system.
But I can't go! I'm needed here!
I know. You have to be with your family.
I'd give anything for the peace of the sewer swamp.
I say that to myself every Thanksgiving.

Unity, I'm staying here to handle the blizzard response. You and Tip go fight those wildfires.
Yes, ma'am!
When we're on duty, you're my employee first, girlfriend second.
You bet!
We need to be professional and not let our brains turn to relationship mush
Omigosh, but first you have to hear what Buddy said about Sparkle!
Now I'm jonesing for brain mush.

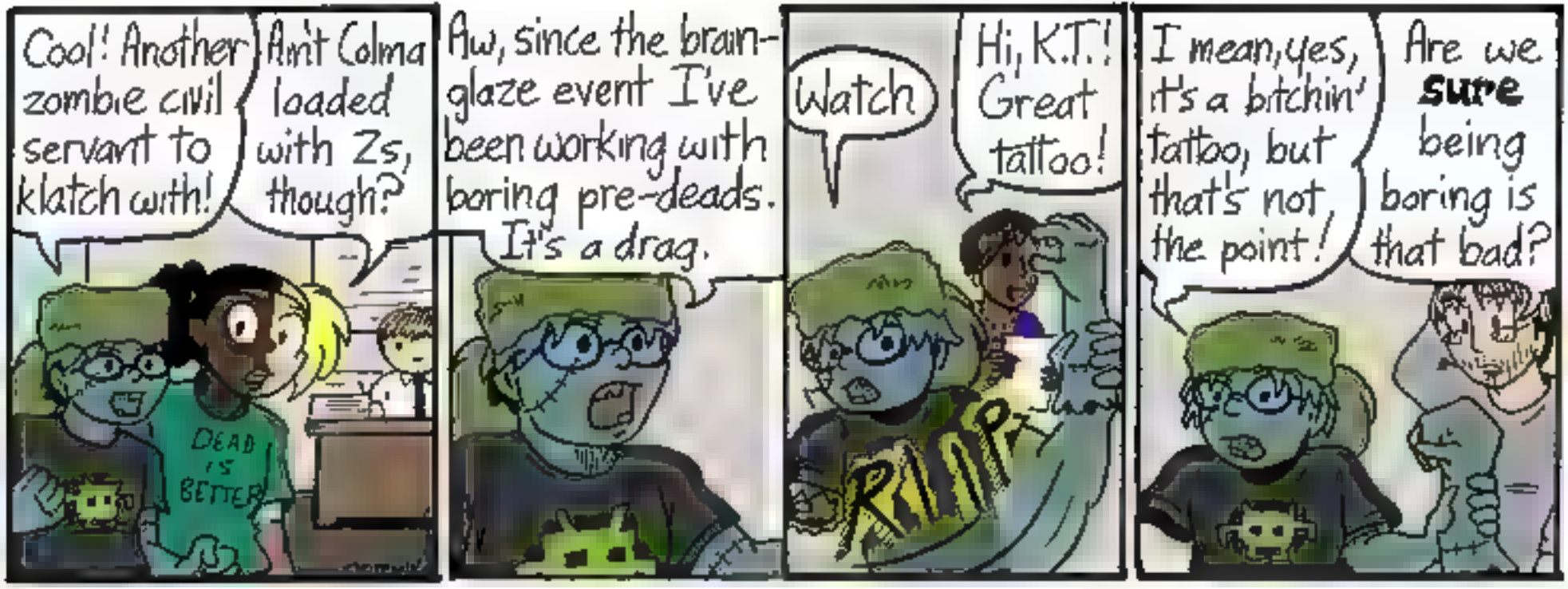

Then H.T. hit on me again, and I went, no way, mister!
Babe, I know you wanna brag about folks flirting with you.
Um.
And I know you want praise for the very basic act of turning them down.
So that's exactly what you get! Good dog!
Actualized dog!
Long as you keep doing that hilarious leg twitch thing.

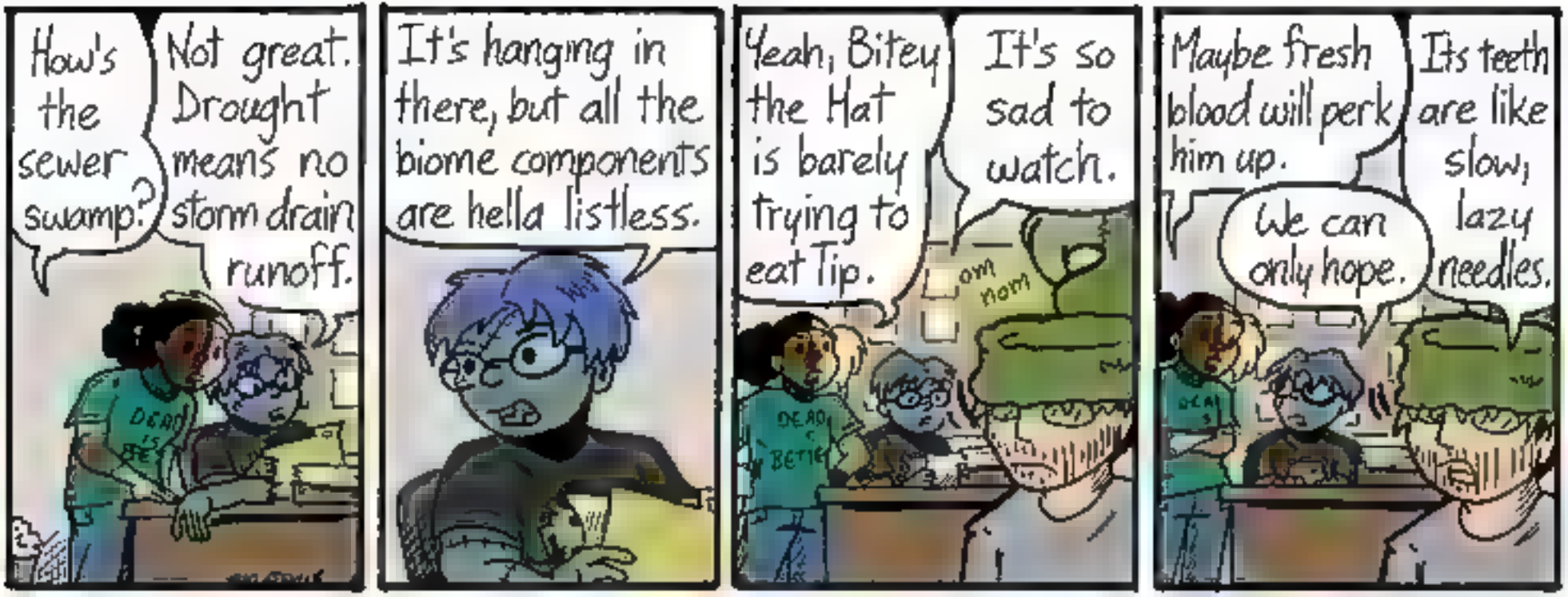

We shoulda dusted off sooner. Storm's right on my ear.
Did you start work on making a new backup of our files?
Hm. Lemme see if I've had any time or decent Internet.
NO.
It'll be better in California.
You shingling me? We gotta touch down through fire.
It's like the world is against us.
I guess for calzones other than me that's a new feeling.
Speaking of ears, Nick, I dropped one in your vents.

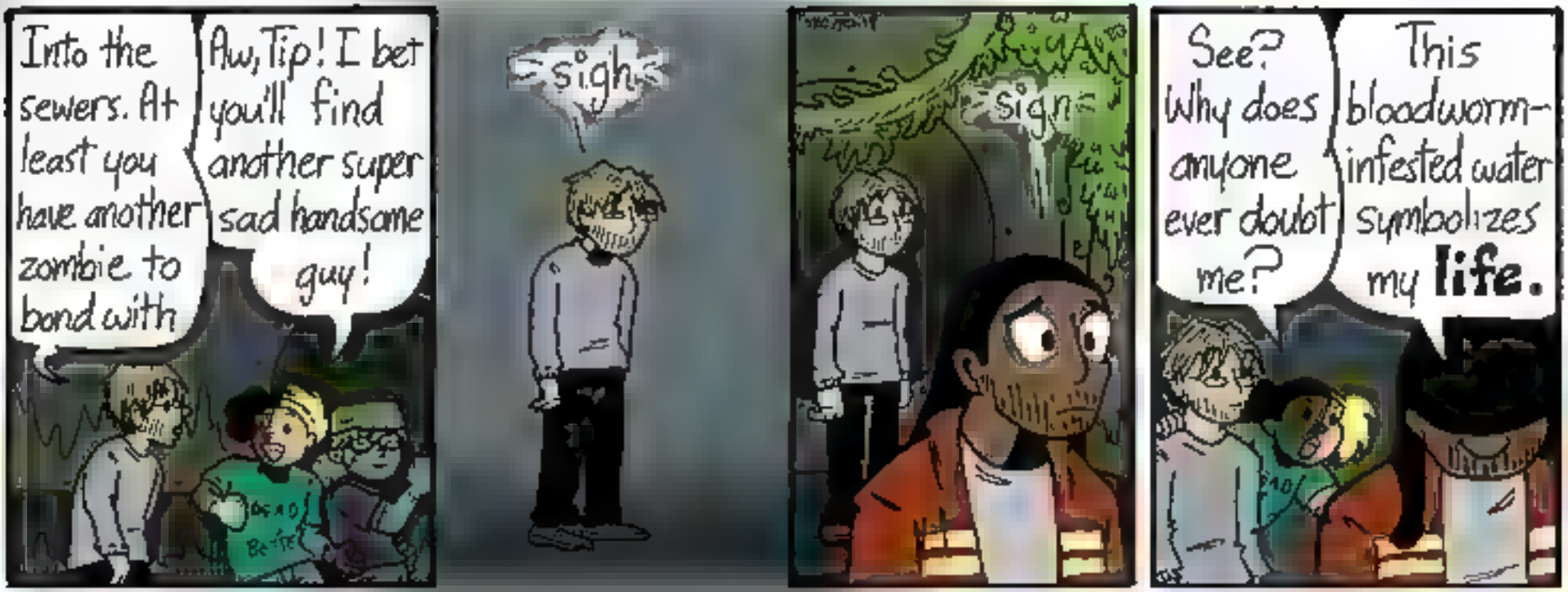
Nick's in-flight movie is YouTube videos of guys playing Xbox. I miss babe.
She sent along her briefing.
"Objectives.
1. Divert water to sewer swamp.
2. Relocate sapients threatened by fire.
"3. Make Nick quit complaining about working fire control.
4. Unity, stop picking your nose."
It's like babe in paper form! Can I smooch it?
"5. Tip, limit hookups with handsome beast-men to preferably none."


Recycle Bin
sunset.png
table new unsynced week 10.txt - WordPad
Home
View
Paste
Font
Paragraph
Insert
Editing
STRIP SIX
PANEL ONE
(Goose Girl screams at Shelby from outside the room.)
Goose Girl: SEPTEMBER? WHERE ARE YOU?!?
(Shelby shoves Nera back into the ducts.)
Shelby: Right! Back in the ducts!
Nera: Oof!
PANEL TWO
Goose Girl: PANOPTICA NEEDS TO TALK TO YOU! WITH EXTREME PREJUDICE!
Shelby: I don't know how much she knows. You're safer hidden.
PANEL THREE
Shelby: She can only sense you if she's concentrating. I'll try subtly distracting her.
100%

Stay safe out there, Nick.
Yeah, enjoy your cushy sewer duty.
Ha! Sewer doody!
I gotta talk brain-glazed firefighters into rescuing nasturtiums they can't see.
I gotta do it while being an actual aircraft and, oh yeah, everything's on fire.
Hi, Unity! Let's swap limb-care tips and also limbs!
But you're working with those two, so I guess we're even?


Cool! Another zombie civil servant to klatch with!
Ain't Colma loaded with Zs, though?
DEAD IS BETTER
Aw, since the brain-glaze event I've been working with boring pre-deads. It's a drag.
Watch
Hi, K.T.! Great tattoo!
RIP
I mean, yes, it's a bitchin' tattoo, but that's not the point!
Are we **sure** being boring is that bad?


How's the sewer swamp?
Not great. Drought means no storm drain runoff.
It's hanging in there, but all the biome components are hella listless.
Yeah, Bitey the Hat is barely trying to eat Tip.
It's so sad to watch.
om nom
Maybe fresh blood will perk him up.
We can only hope.
Its teeth are like slow, lazy needles.


Into the sewers. At least you have another zombie to bond with
Aw, Tip! I bet you'll find another super sad handsome guy!
sigh
sigh
See? Why does anyone ever doubt me?
This bloodworm-infested water symbolizes my life.

Oh, Artie. Checking up on the swamp?
Yes. If we find a water source, it'll survive.
The problem will be surviving the next drought... and floods ...and mudslides...
And every other disaster thrown at us now that society is blinded and we're vulnerable!
For example, Unity and K.T. are mixing drinks in Wastewater Reclamation
That we can handle. Just shut the blast doors.

You seem troubled.
Things are falling apart.
I spent years trying to prevent a New War—slowly educating humans, keeping nonhumans on a moderate path...
Now it's happening anyway, ahead of all my schedules, and everything I did was wrong.
I can tell because you didn't notice my non-fabulousness.
Actually, I kind of like the rugged look.

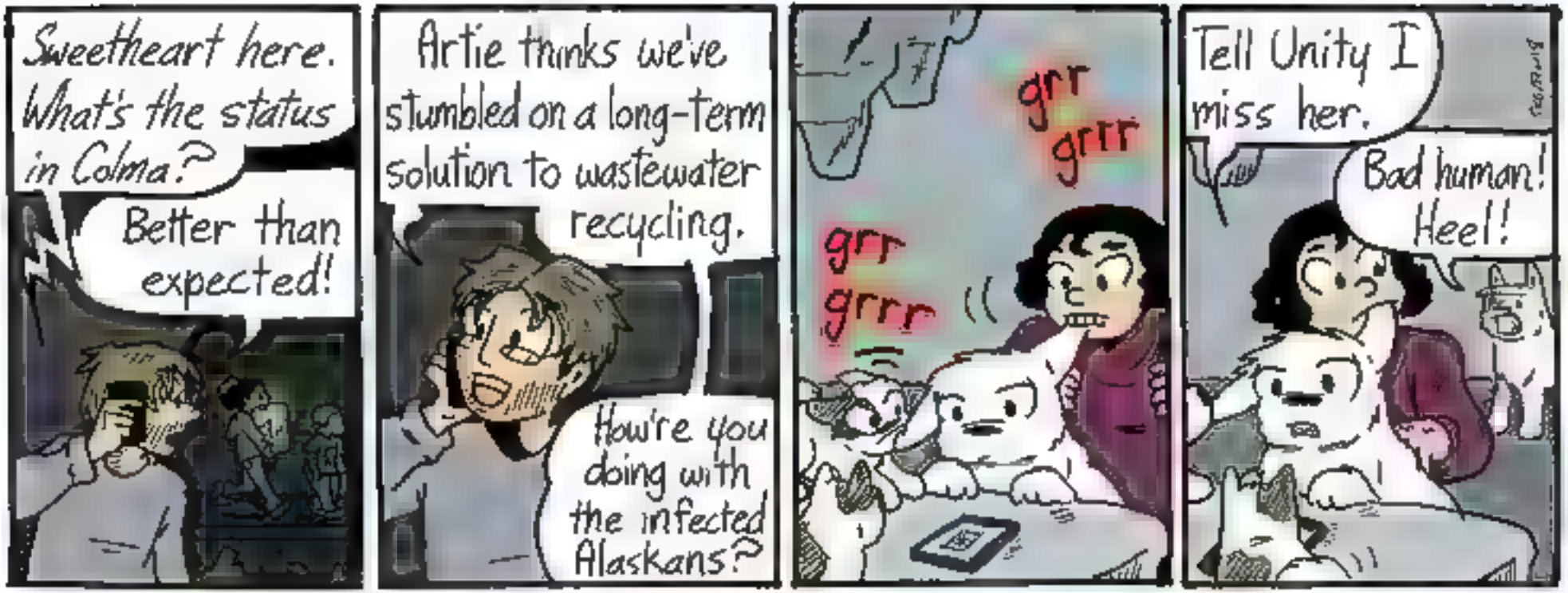
Do you know what caused the reality blindness epidemic?
All I can offer is a guess.
The mad-genius cure causes reality blindness. Someone, presumably Anasigma, has dosed large swaths of the population.
That's .. quite a guess
They disseminated it with the atomizer you used on your first Alaska mission.
Okay, now you're just showing off.
I try to keep in practice.

Why didn't you share these ideas with us?
A while back, I asked if you knew where Skin Horse got its name.
It's from a children's book.
It encapsulates why I can't trust your agency.
You have something against children's books?
No, I- it's more that specific book...
Because I always thought Flat Stanley was up to no good.
Why do I even try to be clever?

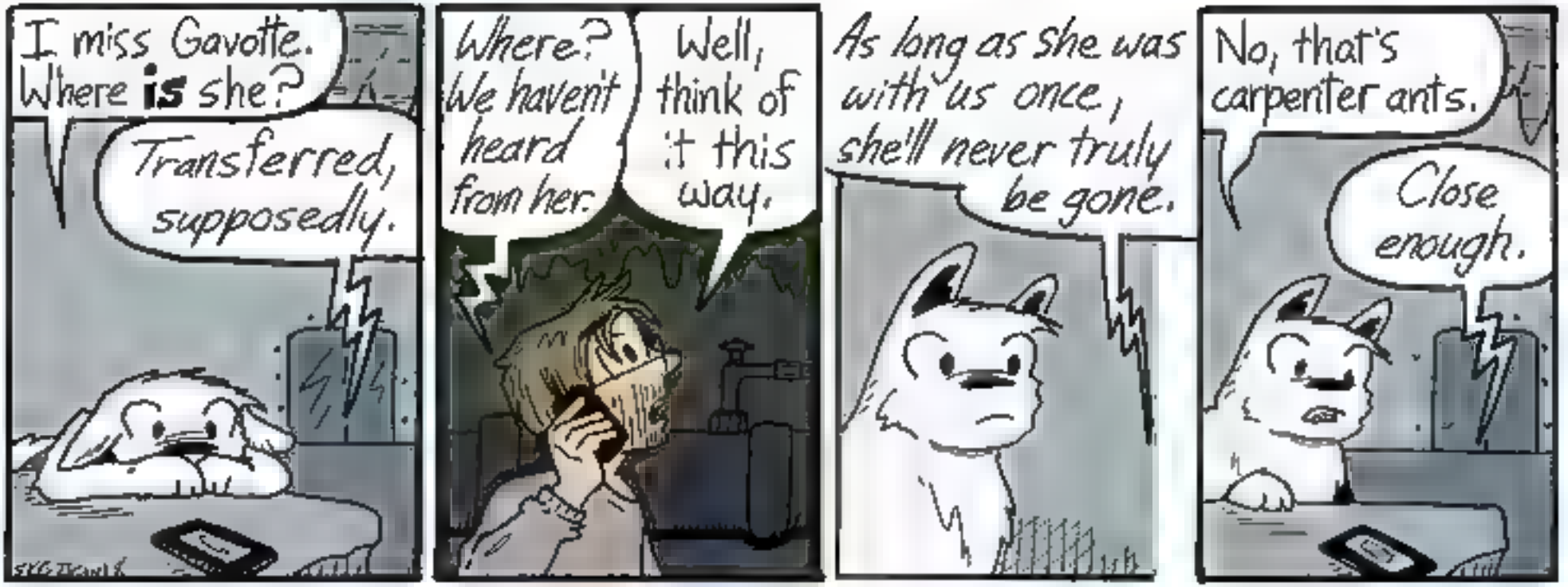
Once there was a Velveteen Rabbit who belonged to a Boy.
The rabbit was very sad because it was only a toy rabbit, not a Real one.
"Take heart," said the old Skin Horse in the nursery. "If the Boy loves you, then you will become Real."
How do you have puppets for this?
I have puppets for everything!

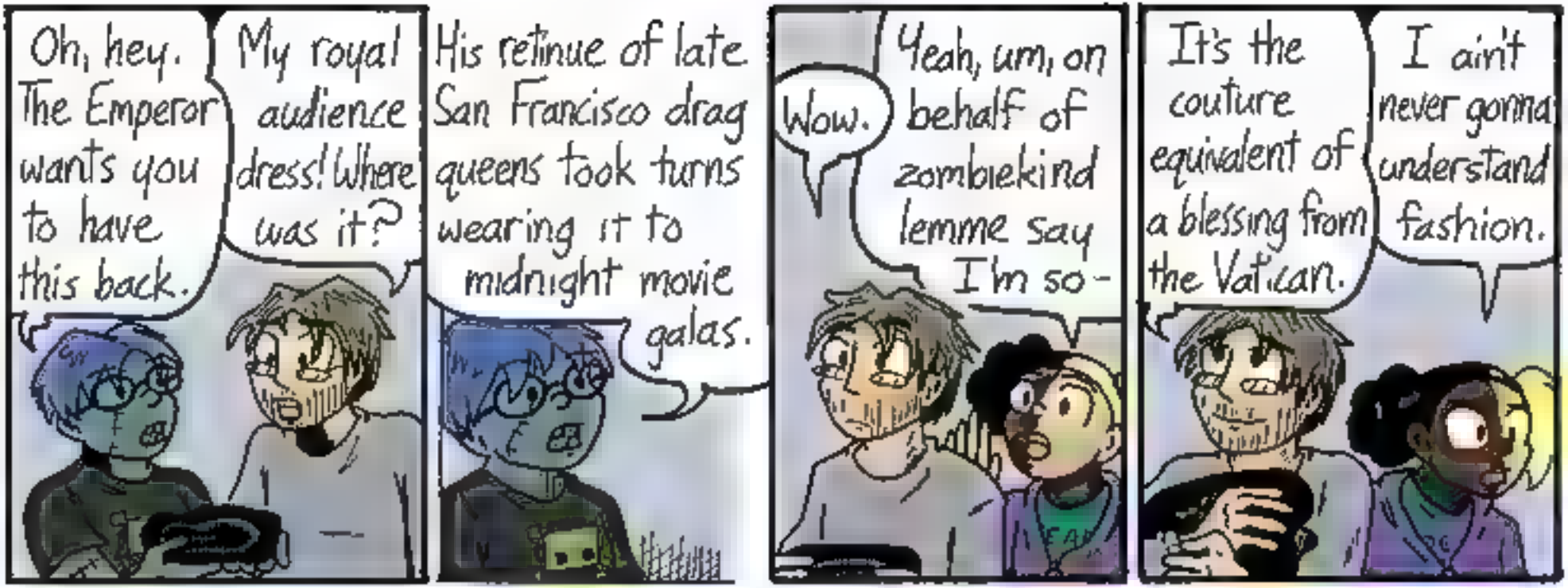
...and the Velveteen Rabbit earns the Boy's love and becomes Real. The end.
Yes, that's the story.
So what?
Tip, you mean well, but there are things you don't grasp about nonhuman sapients.
Guys! K.T. and I had the best idea! Let's feed the sewer swamp toxic waste!
And there are things nonhumans don't grasp about basic common sense.
Good for what ails ya!

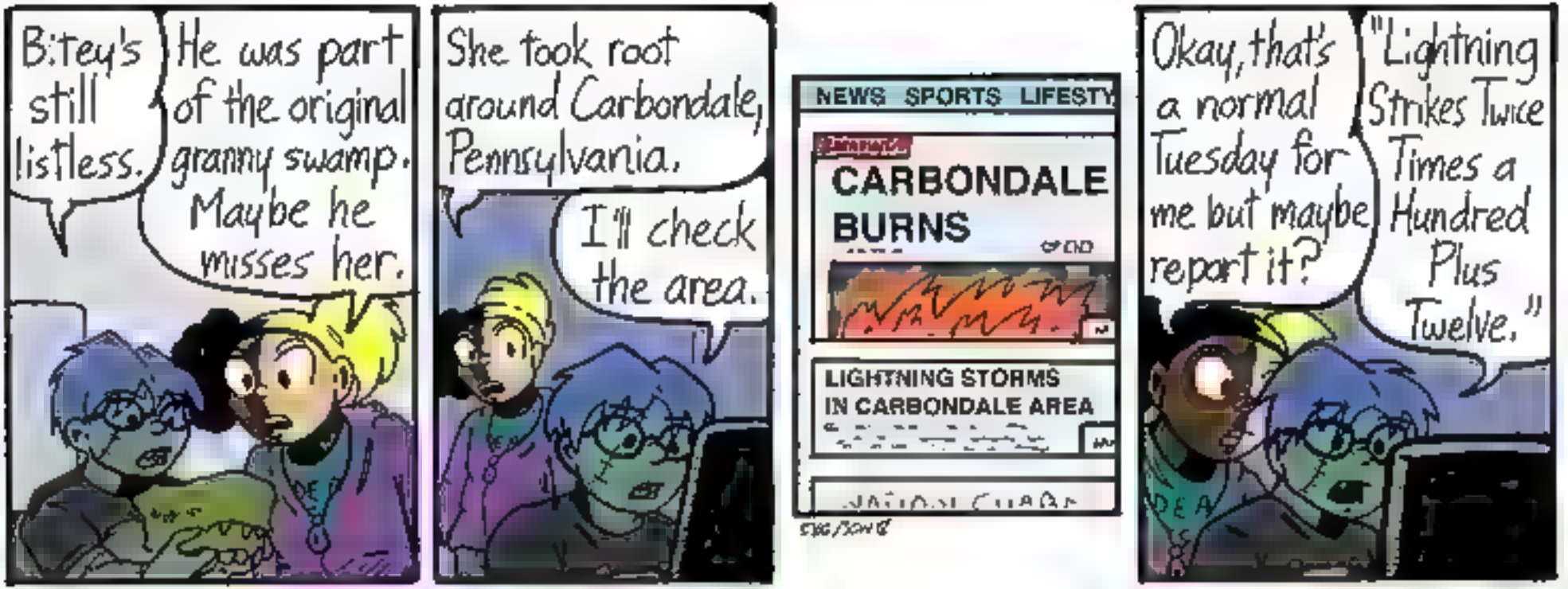
You want to dump wastewater in the swamp?
Unity was like, we're thirsty enough to drink it, why not Swampy?
These sewers drain directly into the Bay!
Cheers!
SLOSH
SLURP
ahhhh
Admittedly, the water needs to get there first.
Yup, those are the noises I make when I drink sewage.

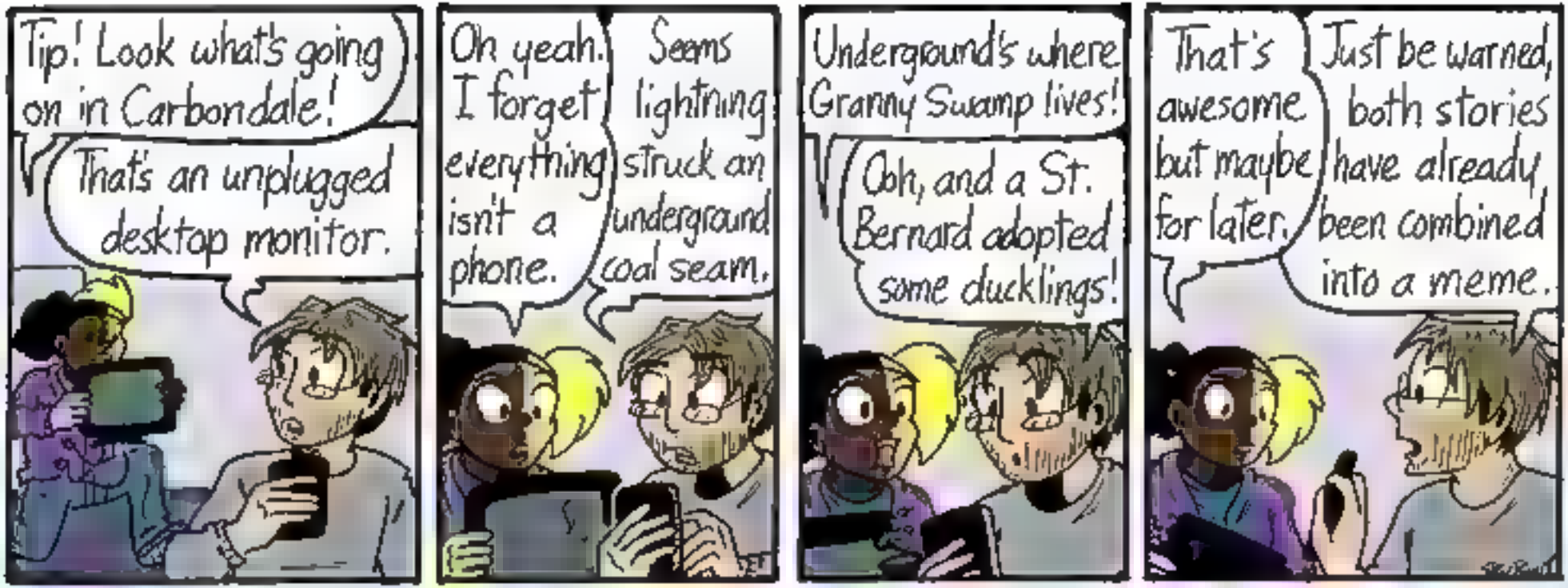

Sweetheart here. What's the status in Colma?
Better than expected!
Artie thinks we've stumbled on a long-term solution to wastewater recycling.
How're you doing with the infected Alaskans?
grr
grrr
grr
grrr
Tell Unity I miss her.
Bad human! Heel!

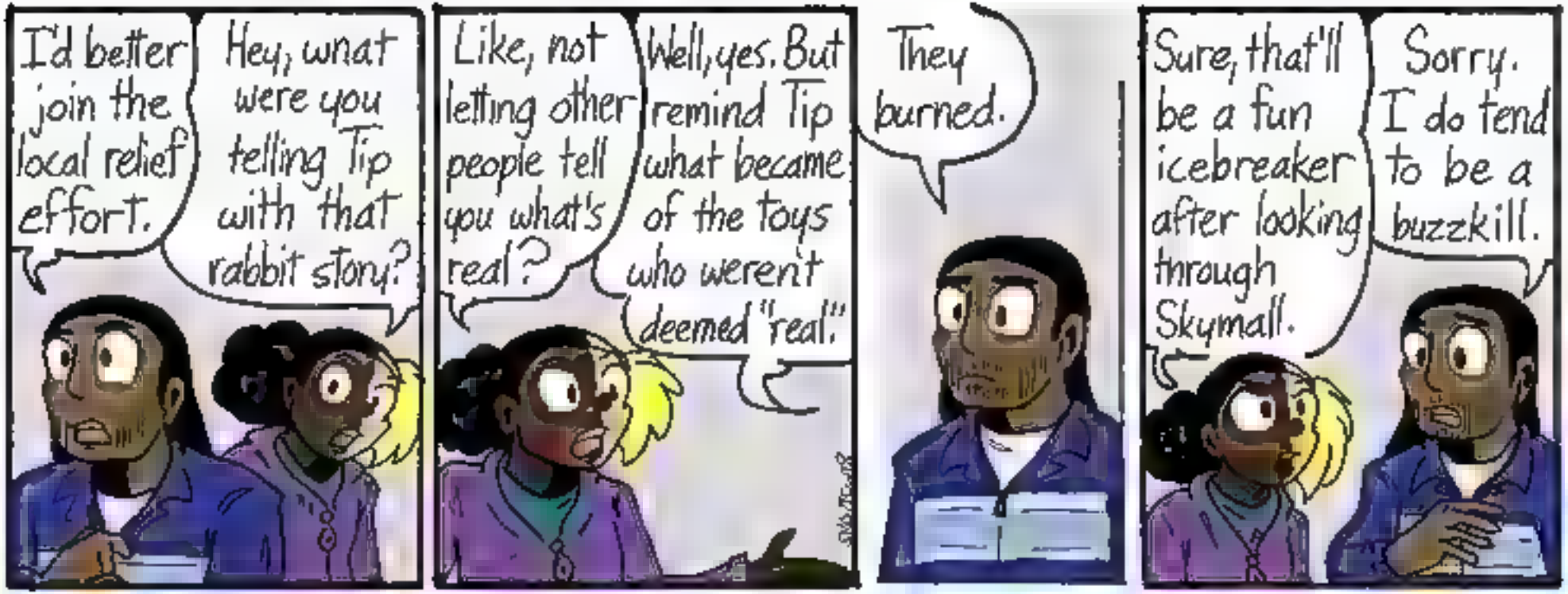
The blizzard isn't letting up.
You staving off cabin fever?
I've got nano-infected weirdos rooming with an apocalyptic tiger cult. It's cabin bubonic plague.
You're the director. What would Gavotte do?
Drink tea and smugly watch everyone else fight?
...drat, that could work.
Just stop short of swarming everyone.

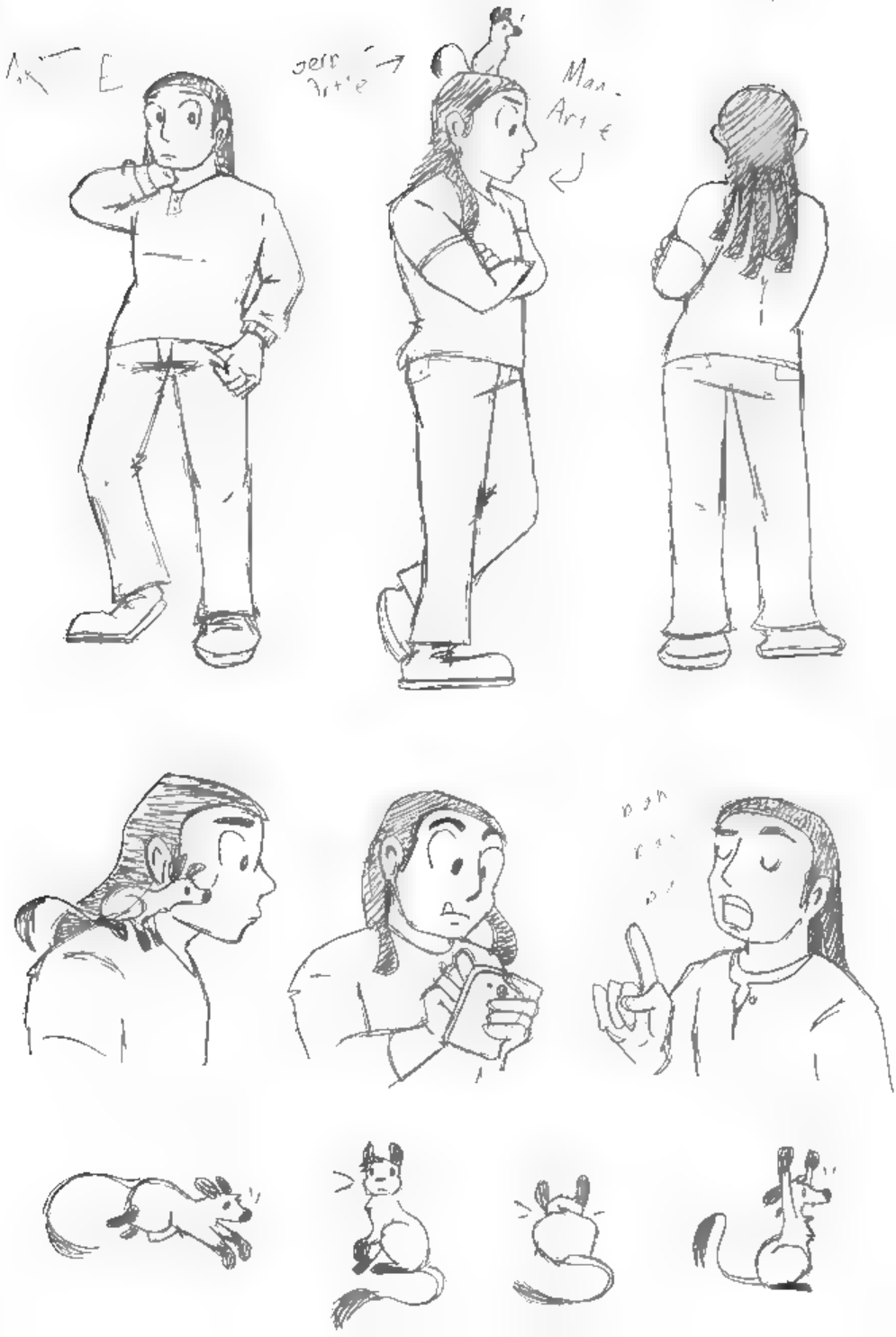

I miss Gavotte. Where **is** she?
Transferred, supposedly.
Where? We haven't heard from her.
Well, think of it this way.
As long as she was with us once, she'll never truly be gone.
No, that's carpenter ants.
Close enough.

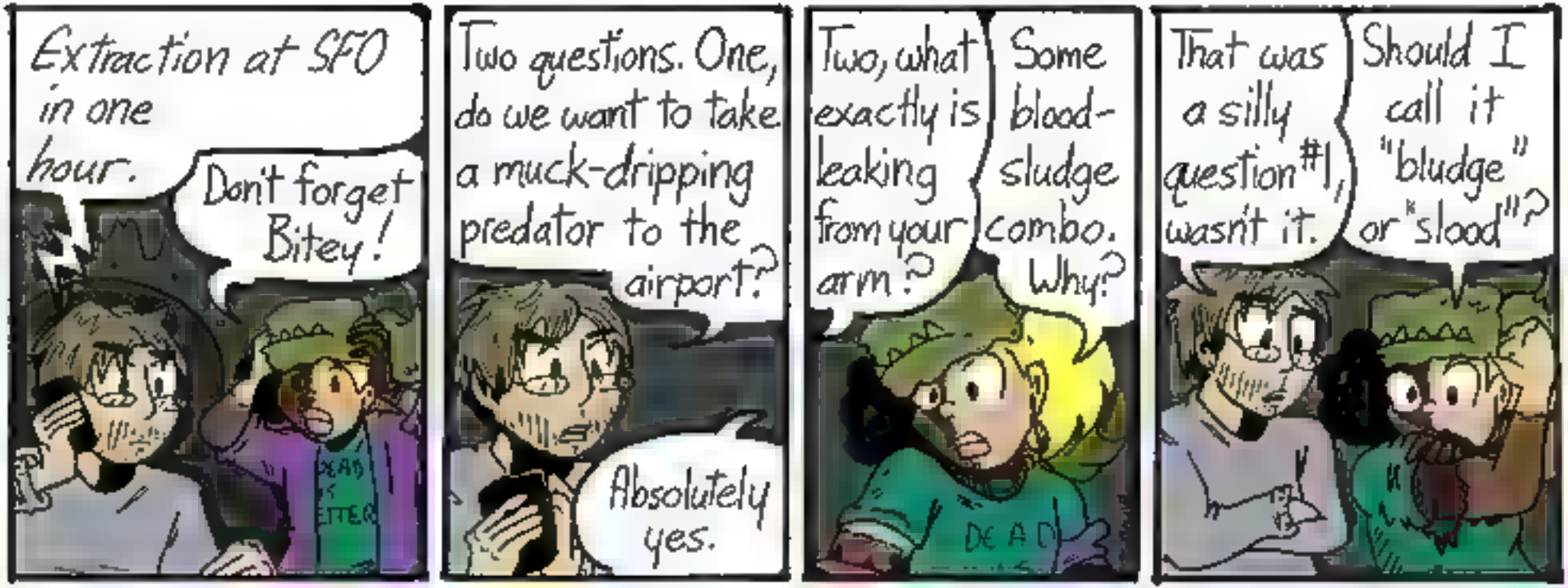

Oh, hey. The Emperor wants you to have this back.
My royal audience dress! Where was it?
His retinue of late San Francisco drag queens took turns wearing it to midnight movie galas.
Wow.
Yeah, um, on behalf of zombiekind lemme say I'm so-
It's the couture equivalent of a blessing from the Vatican.
I ain't never gonna understand fashion.


Bitey's still listless.
He was part of the original granny swamp. Maybe he misses her.
She took root around Carbondale, Pennsylvania.
I'll check the area.
NEWS SPORTS LIFESTY
CARBONDALE BURNS
LIGHTNING STORMS IN CARBONDALE AREA
Okay, that's a normal Tuesday for me but maybe report it?
"Lightning Strikes Twice Times a Hundred Plus Twelve."

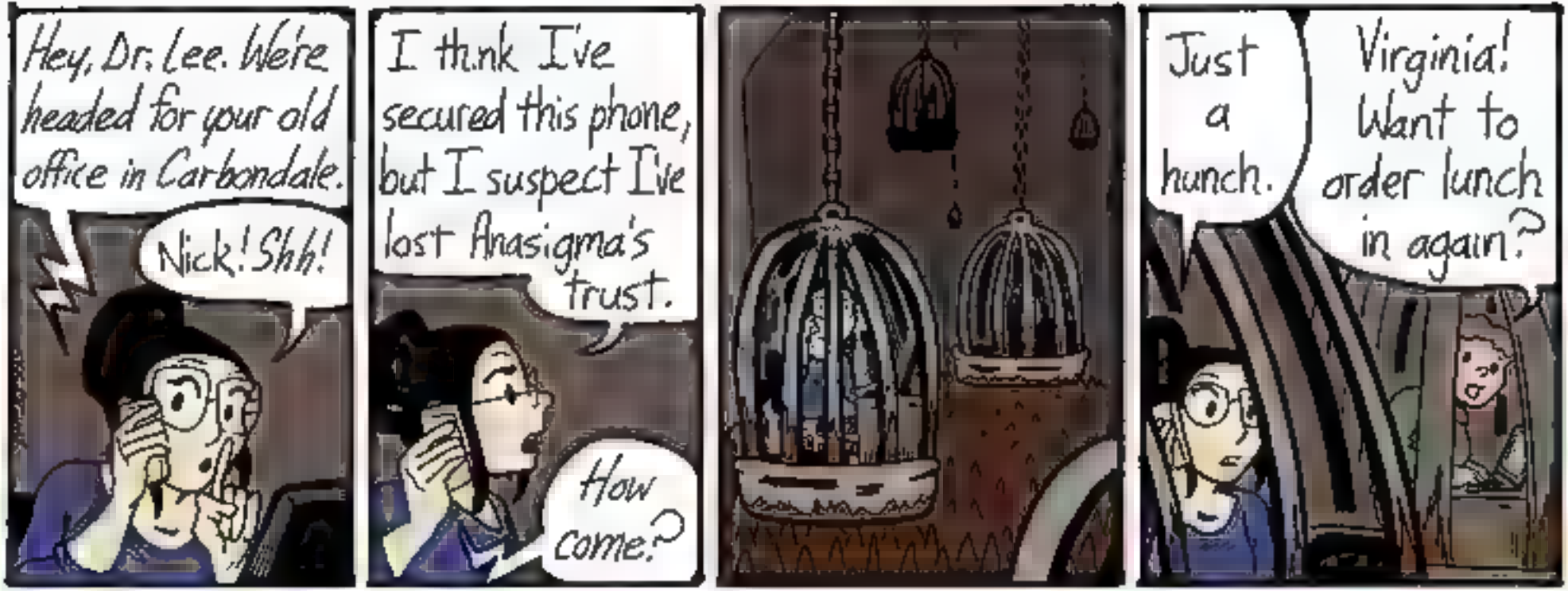

Tip! Look what's going on in Carbondale!
That's an unplugged desktop monitor.
Oh yeah. I forget everything isn't a phone.
Seems lightning struck an underground coal seam.
Underground's where Granny Swamp lives!
Ooh, and a St. Bernard adopted some ducklings!
That's awesome but maybe for later.
Just be warned, both stories have already been combined into a meme.

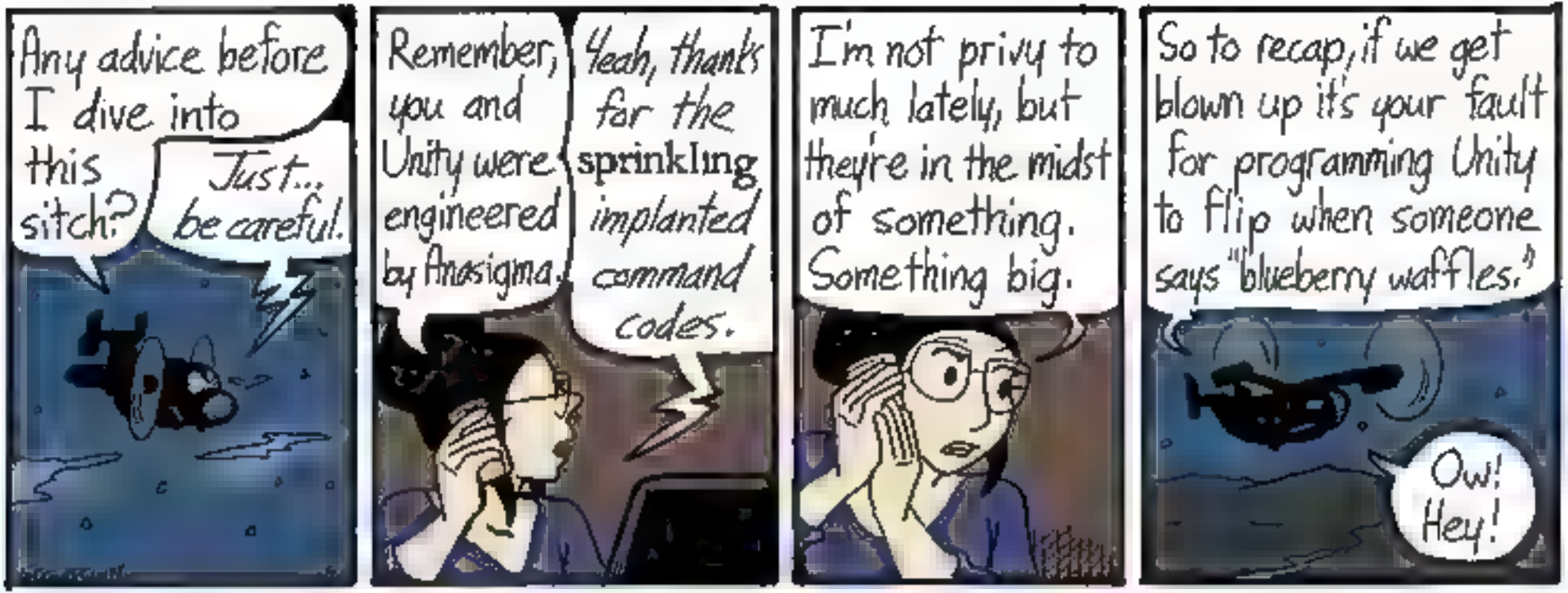

I'd better join the local relief effort.
Hey, what were you telling Tip with that rabbit story?
Like, not letting other people tell you what's real?
Well, yes. But remind Tip what became of the toys who weren't deemed "real."
They burned.
Sure, that'll be a fun icebreaker after looking through Skymall.
Sorry. I do tend to be a buzzkill.


Art E
Jess Art'e
Man - Art e


Extraction at SFO in one hour.
Don't forget Bitey!
Two questions. One, do we want to take a muck-dripping predator to the airport?
Absolutely yes.
Two, what exactly is leaking from your arm?
Some blood-sludge combo. Why?
That was a silly question #1, wasn't it.
Should I call it "bludge" or "slood"?

Congrats on saving all of one overcast sapient.
Thanks, Nick. Call up all info on the Cypress.
I mean I only rescued a jillion zombies but nbd.
Unity, what if A-Sig is in the area?
I flew through an actual wall of fire.
I packed spare fists. We're good.
Nobody appreciates my thrilling side quests.
Hey, you didn't wanna hear what sewer stuff I ate.
DEAD


Hey, Dr. Lee. We're headed for your old office in Carbondale.
Nick! Shh!
I think I've secured this phone, but I suspect I've lost Anasigma's trust.
How come?
Just a hunch.
Virginia! Want to order lunch in again?


Any advice before I dive into this sitch?
Just... be careful.
Remember, you and Unity were engineered by Anasigma.
Yeah, thanks for the sprinkling implanted command codes.
I'm not privy to much lately, but they're in the midst of something. Something big.
So to recap, if we get blown up it's your fault for programming Unity to flip when someone says "blueberry waffles."
Ow! Hey!

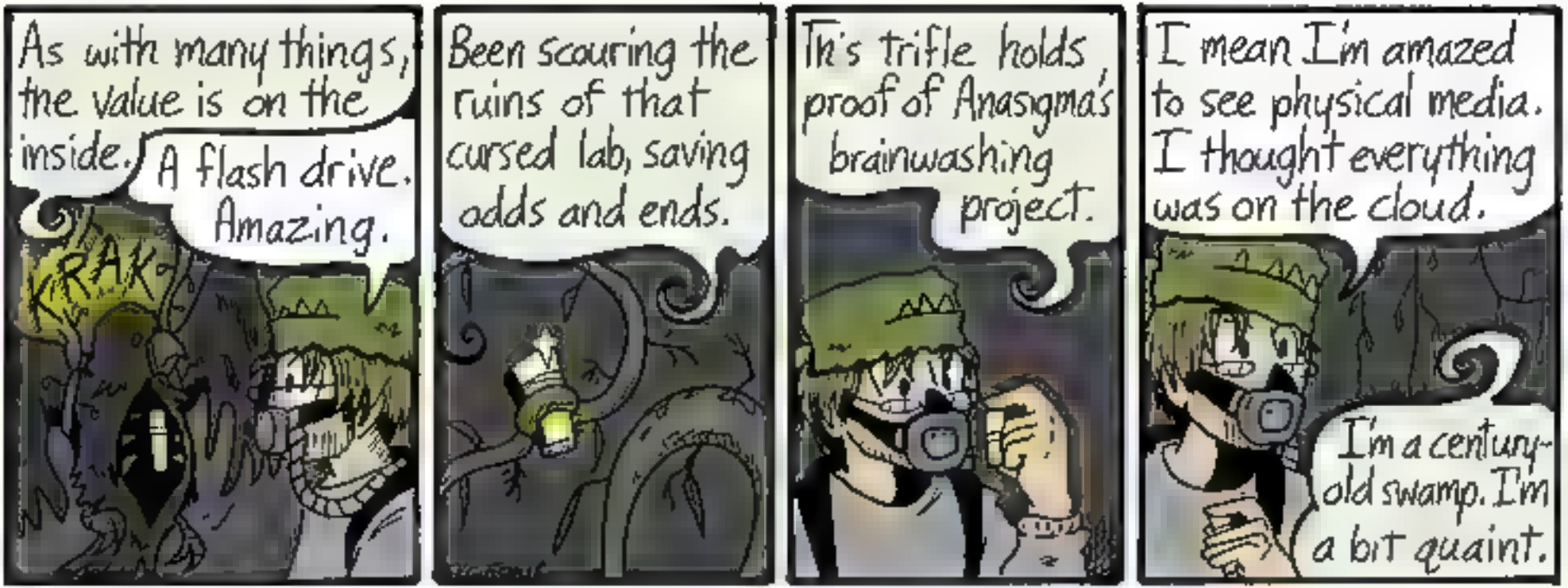
Welp, Carbondale's fraught.
Were looking for the Cypress. Scan underground.
Biomass confirmed in the old mining tunnels.
Hard to believe there's anything alive down there
pew
BOOM
pew
Mother-hugging woodpeckers!
Except the dudes with the anti-aircraft rockets. Those guys are fine.
You didn't say sleet about scanning the surface.

Who's the shooty dudes?
Looks like National Guard. Probably called in for evac.
DEAD
Cool, let's punch 'em outta the way.
Unity, we try not to attack our own military.
DEAD
Except when we got Nick out of Area 51.
Well, yes.
And beat up AG-I
Well-
And any time it'd be funny.
Okay, so we don't try very hard.
Let's go! Bitey's hungry!

Find Granny Cypress! I'll hold off the Guard!
They have anti-aircraft cannons!
DEAD IS BETTER
They ain't got anti-Unity cannons!
DEAD IS BETTER
PJJJOOO
thpk
DEAD IS BETTER
Okay I know they are also effectively anti-Unity cannons, I was making a point.
I'll leave you to it.
DEAD IS

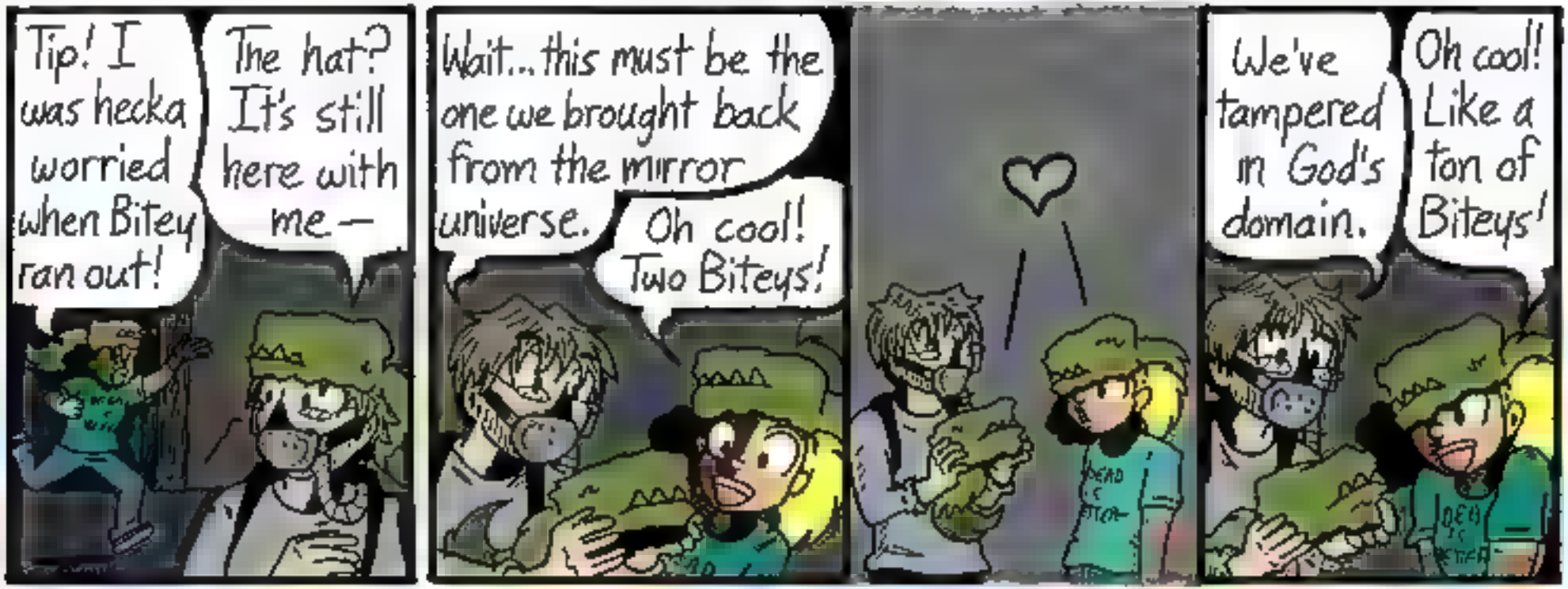
Cypress? Are you down here?
Why, Tip! Mon chèr, is that you?
Glad you're all right.
I'm not, child. I don't want you to see me like this.
I'm sure you're fi—
See? Beautiful as ever.
Flatterer. Brush aside the dead rats and have a scavenged Twinkie.

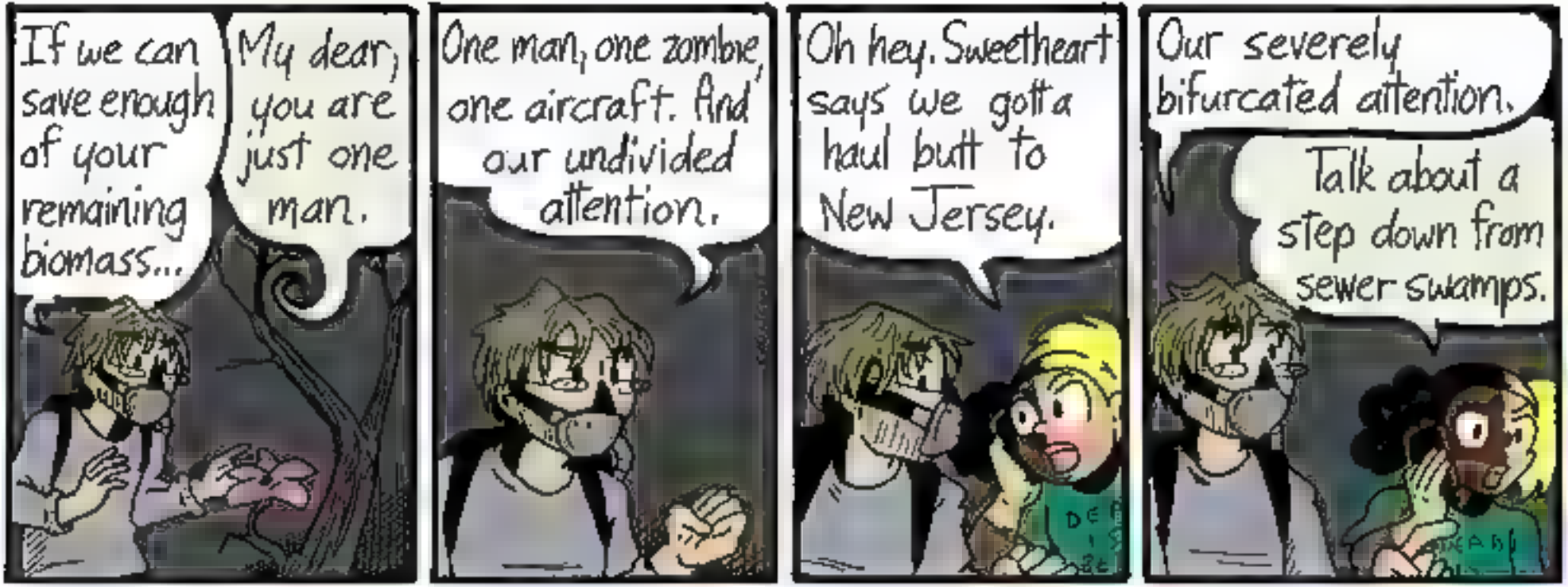
We're in the thick of it now, chère
Is this the New War everyone's been warning us about?
Not quite, but the soldiers are here for something key to it.
What?
This.
That's a dead crow gummed together with M&M wrappers.
You try impressing with bits flushed down the storm drains.


As with many things, the value is on the inside.
A flash drive. Amazing.
KRAK
Been scouring the ruins of that cursed lab, saving odds and ends.
This trifle holds proof of Anasigma's brainwashing project.
I mean I'm amazed to see physical media. I thought everything was on the cloud.
I'm a century-old swamp. I'm a bit quaint.

Artie was right. A-Sig's using the Cure to make people reality-blind.
At first it had too many side effects.
But at low doses, bolstered by Whimsy mind-altering software ...
Whimsy? It's a nonhuman company!
Why would Whimsy sell out?
The studio that brought you "P+P2: 2 Proud, 2 Prejudiced"?
Right. Conventional ideas of good and evil mean nothing.
To say nothing of the direct-to-streaming threequel.

I don't think I'm getting out of these caves, chèr.
We'll get you to safety.
So much of me is dead already. I don't think I'm well in the brains.
You sound fine to me.
Then mayhap you can help me find out which office makes lightning and why pancakes.
You're making as much sense as most of my team.
Ah, worse than I feared.


Tip! I was hecka worried when Bitey ran out!
The hat? It's still here with me—
Wait... this must be the one we brought back from the mirror universe.
Oh cool! Two Biteys!
We've tampered in God's domain.
Oh cool! Like a ton of Biteys!


If we can save enough of your remaining biomass...
My dear, you are just one man.
One man, one zombie, one aircraft. And our undivided attention.
Oh hey. Sweetheart says we gotta haul butt to New Jersey.
Our severely bifurcated attention.
Talk about a step down from sewer swamps.

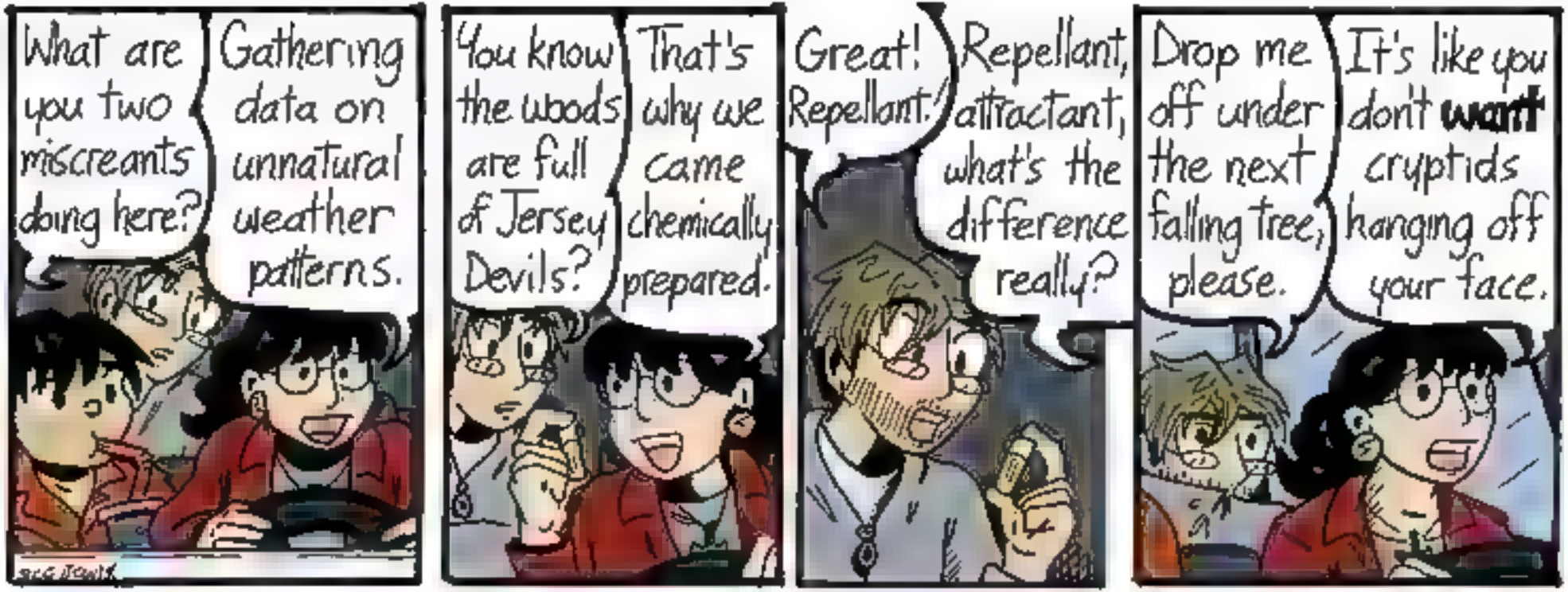
We can't go to the Jersey safehouse! We're needed here!
What is with this friggin' week?
And I'm still stuck in this blizzard. Yeesh.
Okay. Tip, you and Nick fly to Jersey. Unity, you're our man on the ground in Carbondale.
Aw.
DEAD IS
Unity always gets to be the man.
You think putting on pants was gonna change that?
DEAD

Unity, I have faith in your ability to handle this.
Got it, boss babe! Random assault is my middle name!
DEAD IS BETTER
No! Don't do random assault!
Oh. That's gonna be a prob.
Just don't randomly assault people!
I gotta change my middle name, there's all this paperwork...
I have faith in your ability to constantly mess with me.
Always, babe. Off to tow some swamp!

High winds felling trees in the Pine Barrens... This threatens the safehouse and the Jersey Devils.
But the Devils ain't sapient—
Why split hairs? It's Armaggeddon.
Calm your dips. It ain't the end of the-
WOOP WOOP WOOP
Oh hey, the Definitely Not a Hurricane in the Florida Keys alarm!
That was suspiciously specific.
Glad there ain't a major nonhuman settlement there!

The Florida zombie community is in crisis too?
Monitoring. Keep your pretty head on the Jersey mission.
We're spread too thin!
One crisis at a time. That's how my people survive.
Gamers?
Metal-hurling Hebrews, lipgloss.
Sorry. My second guess was "helicopters."
Gamers just find a lady to yell at.

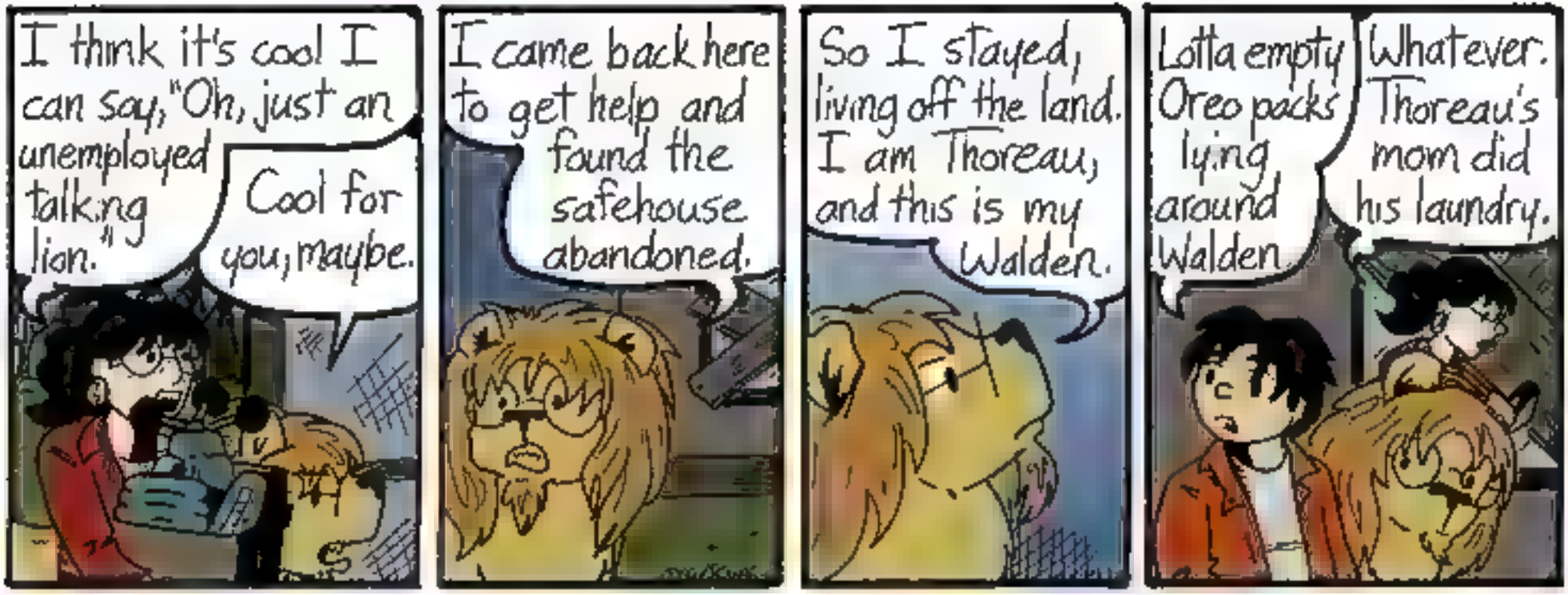
You're on your own from here. These winds are flouncing with me.
It'll be a long walk.
What am I supposed to do, hitchhike with some crazed stranger?
Hey! Dr. Wilkin! Come dodge trees with us!
SCREECH
Crazed acquaintances might be an option.
Ha! That's as funny as when I foresaw it!

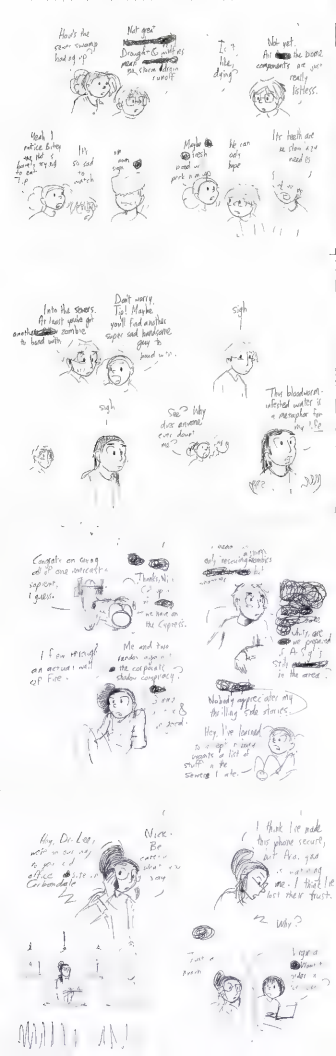

What are you two miscreants doing here?
Gathering data on unnatural weather patterns.
You know the woods are full of Jersey Devils?
That's why we came chemically prepared.
Great! Repellant!
Repellant, attractant, what's the difference really?
Drop me off under the next falling tree, please.
It's like you don't **want** cryptids hanging off your face.

These are strange times, k.ds.
And the shadow media's on the case.
Relax, sir. We're in the best of all local possible timelines.
CRASH!
SCREEE
See, in some universes I spilled my pop.
Good luck finding stuff stranger than us.

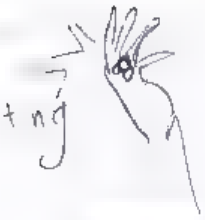
You kids can set your weather equipment up in the safehouse.
We're not kids!
Outside would be better.
Not safe. There are monsters out here.
YAAH!
WHAP
Sorry! There are monsters out here!
I can theoretically buy booze!

Leo! What are you doing here?
Keeping a roof over my head!
It's nuts! One minute I'm on a book tour for my debut novel...
...and the next, my editor is screaming for a SWAT team to contain the wild animal in her hotel room!
This should come up in those self-publishing seminars.
I'm allowed to be a wild animal in hotel rooms. It's in my rider.


I think it's cool I can say, "Oh, just an unemployed talking lion."
Cool for you, maybe.
I came back here to get help and found the safehouse abandoned.
So I stayed, living off the land. I am Thoreau, and this is my Walden.
Lotta empty Oreo packs lying around Walden
Whatever. Thoreau's mom did his laundry.


Here's the [redacted] swamp looking up
Not you [redacted] Drought & wildfires mean [redacted] on these trees aren't safe!
It's like, doing?
Who, me? All [redacted] the insect communities are just really fertile.
Yeah I notice bitey [redacted] are the [redacted] barely try to bite me.
Hm. So sad to watch.
Me [redacted] sad too.
Maybe [redacted] both [redacted] need to [redacted] pick a side.
We can [redacted] both [redacted]
It hurts me as [redacted] as you are right to
Into the stars. At least you'll get [redacted] zombie to hand with
Don't worry. Tal. Maybe you'll find another super cool battlesuit guy to [redacted] to.
Sigh
Sigh
Sigh
Why does everyone care about me?
This bloodworm-infested outfit is a metaphor for my life
Cygnets on Gong are off and unfortunately [redacted] again, I guess.
Thanks, Ni.
Me and two random engineers [redacted] are probably shadow conspiracy.
The Cygnets.
I'll see enough of [redacted] on actual walk off Five.
Screw [redacted] & bored.
Wubbaby applique alert, omg the thing I take pictures...
Hey, I've learned to [redacted] respect people's lists of stuff + the sources I vote.
Hey, Dr. Lee, [redacted] we can stay in your old office in Cambridge
Nice. Be careful [redacted] what you [redacted] way
I think I've made the phone secure, but Eva, you [redacted] nightmare me. I hate lie but I [redacted] their trust.
Why?
I guess [redacted] a brain
I guess [redacted] brain is [redacted] use

IT'S ALIVE!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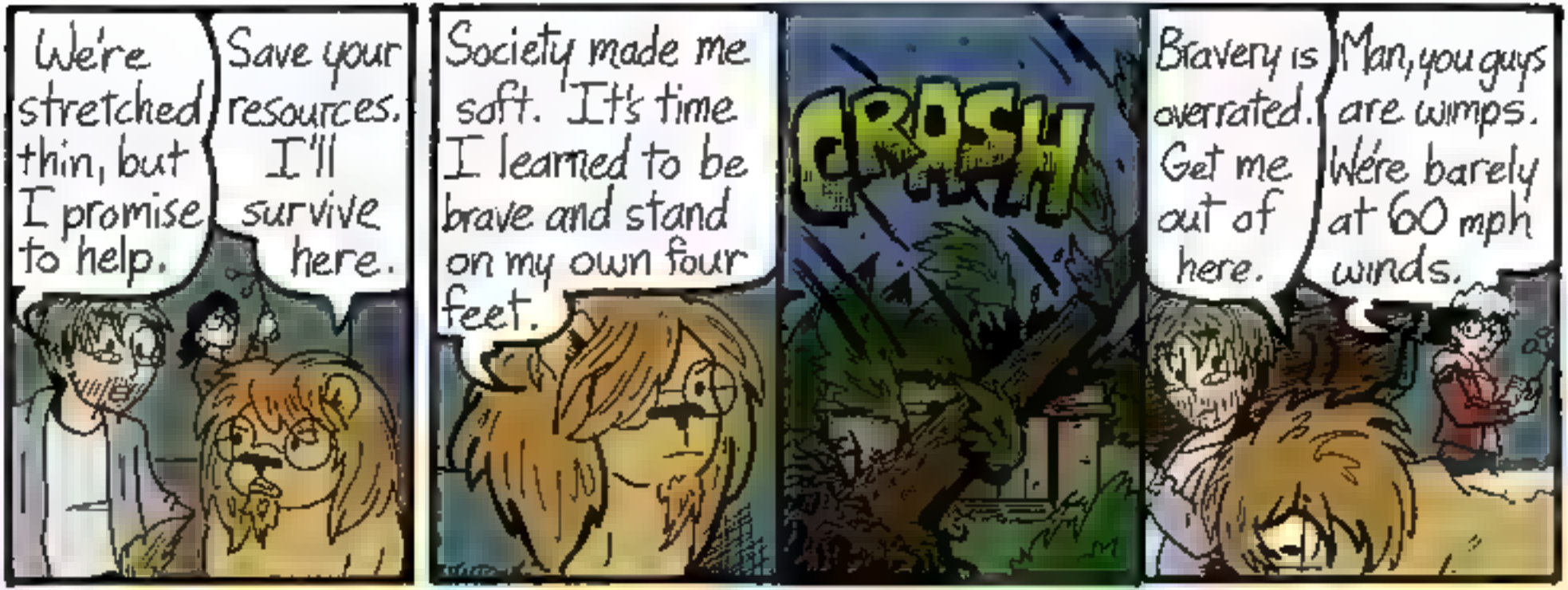
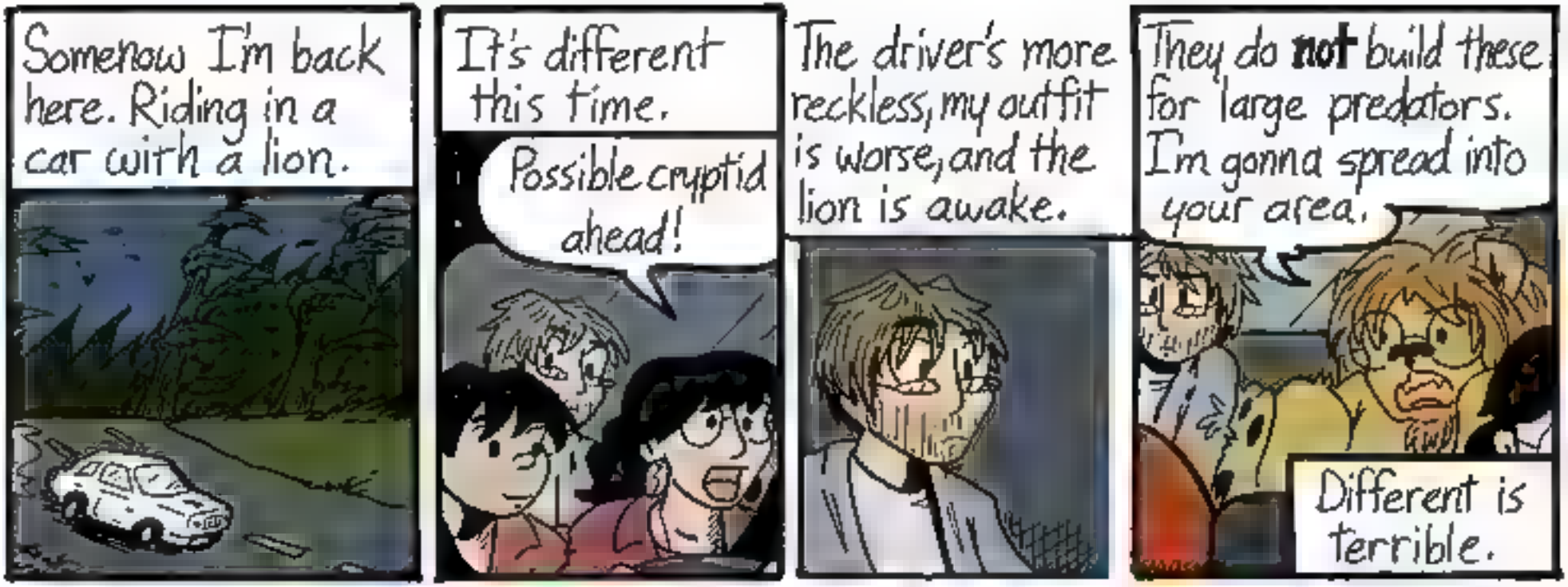
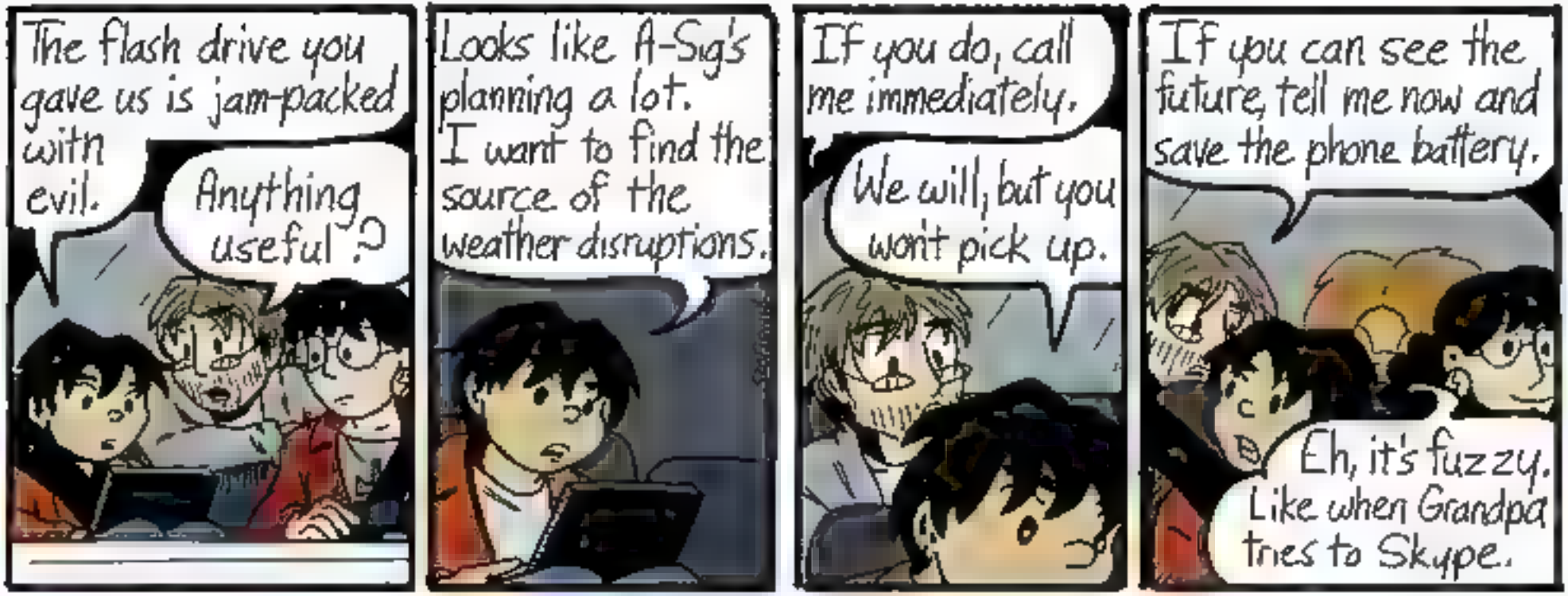

We're stretched thin, but I promise to help.
Save your resources. I'll survive here.
Society made me soft. It's time I learned to be brave and stand on my own four feet.
CRASH
Bravery is overrated. Get me out of here.
Man, you guys are wimps. We're barely at 60 mph winds.

We have to go. The safehouse isn't safe anymore.
Negatory. We need our weather readings.
You can't report it if you're dead!
Okay, strong point. But data is tough to get.
With hard proof, we could blow this wide open! But we don't have it!
Unity, what's your opinion on throwing grease on a fire?
For it. Doing it now. Why?

Jonah! We got the goods! Pack it in!
One sec!
The storm's about to get worse! What are you waiting for?
Hold on.
KRAKKA
DOOM
For the storm to get worse. Let's go.
I wanna go back to the house with the trees falling on it.


Somehow I'm back here. Riding in a car with a lion.
It's different this time.
Possible cryptid ahead!
The driver's more reckless, my outfit is worse, and the lion is awake.
They do **not** build these for large predators. I'm gonna spread into your area.
Different is terrible.

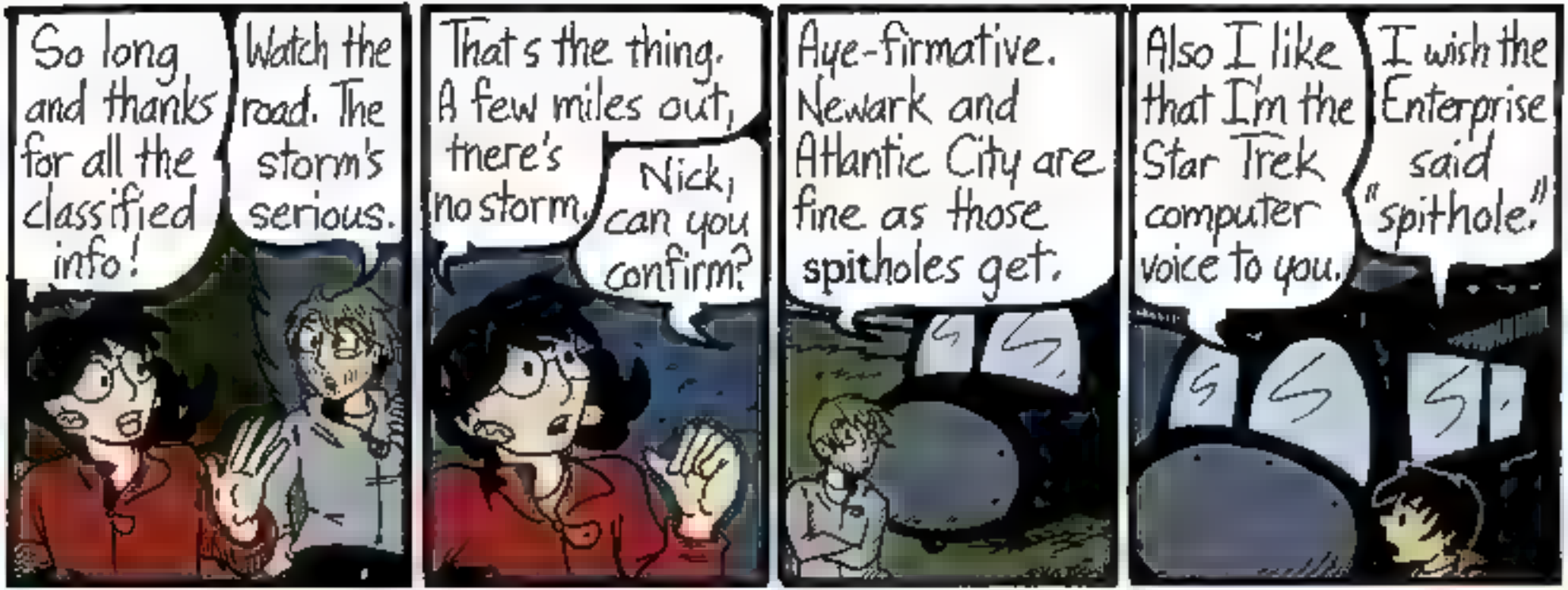

The flash drive you gave us is jam-packed with evil.
Anything useful?
Looks like A-Sig's planning a lot. I want to find the source of the weather disruptions.
If you do, call me immediately.
We will, but you won't pick up.
If you can see the future, tell me now and save the phone battery.
Eh, it's fuzzy. Like when Grandpa tries to Skype.

Nick! I'm back!
Great. I risk my fat for you to save one whole client.
Not quite. Let me uncork this chemical.
Why, what's it do?
SKREE
SKREE
SKREE
So much for my upholstery.
There's no pleasing you.

You're so pretty.
I'm twelve,
But I've been t... 12
for a long time.

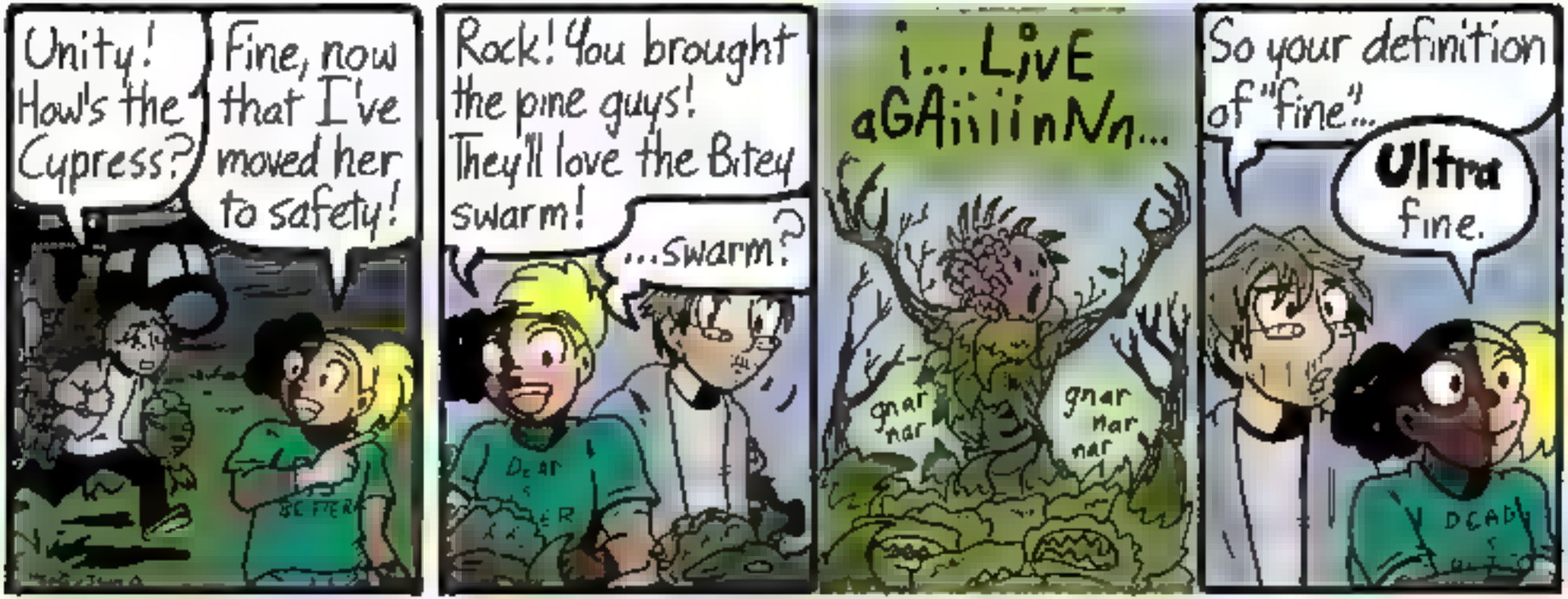
Before we go, lemme get some cryptid shots.
Careful! The Devils are wild animals!
Not only do they have teeth and horns, according to lore they can addle the mind.
Who's a Jersey Devil? You are! Booguma booguma booguma!
The legends are true!
Nera! New shadow mascot!

The Cypress can add these plant creatures to her biomass.
The Cypress? The lost Bayou des Souhaits?
Any more secrets you can leak?
Lean in and I'll tell you who's behind America's worst sloshing perversions.
... your mom ...
As a precog, I should've seen that coming.
As anyone, you should've seen that coming.


So long and thanks for all the classified info!
Watch the road. The storm's serious.
That's the thing. A few miles out, there's no storm.
Nick, can you confirm?
Aye-firmative. Newark and Atlantic City are fine as those spitholes get.
Also I like that I'm the Star Trek computer voice to you.
I wish the Enterprise said "spithole."

We're gonna rebuild the drizzling Cypress out of drizzling Jersey Devils? Is that smart?
Probably not.
Cuz them little darlings can mess you up—
This is how we win.
Team up. Make unlikely alliances. Band together until everyone hears our message.
"Skin Horse: Doing things that are probably not smart."
You're a great pilot and a lousy hype man, Nick.

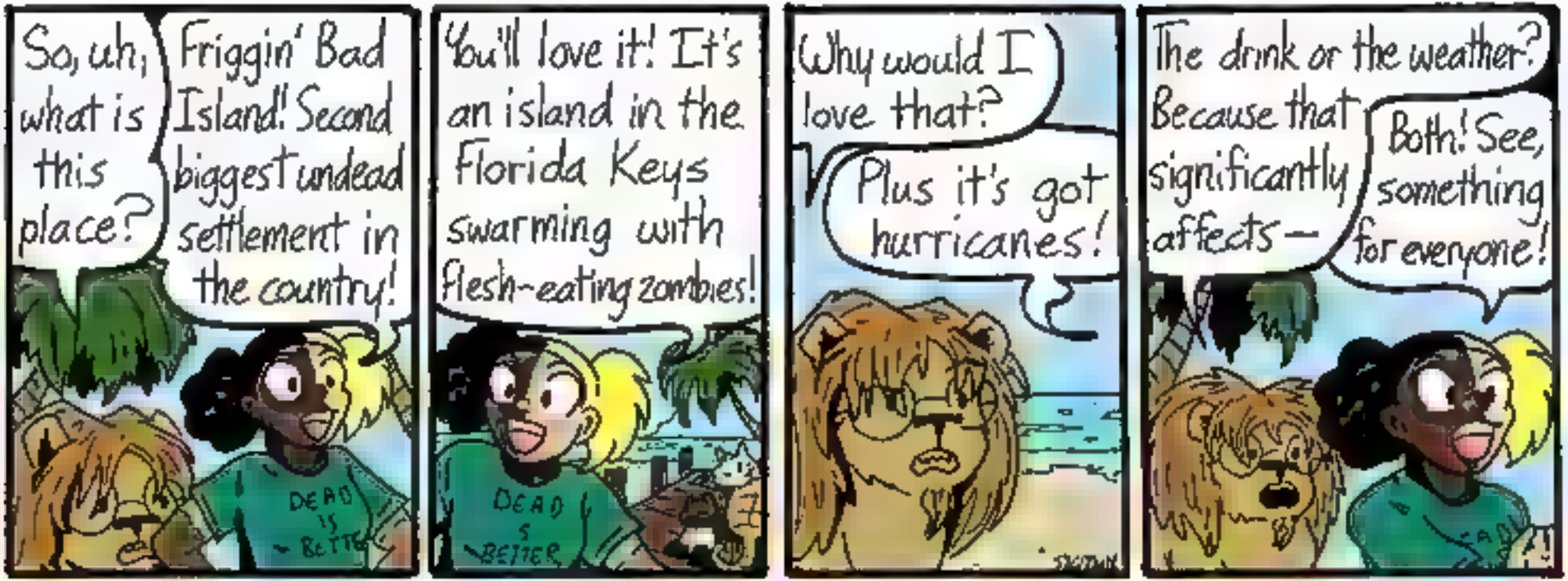
After we rendezvous with Unity, we'll head to the Keys.
Good teamwork, Tip.
I've got loyal dogs dismantling the Captain's weapons before H.T. can get to them.
Sweetheart, my dear, if you would cease this incivility and let me-
SNAP
Ow!
We may have kept the bear traps.
Is it animal cruelty if the animal is a jerk?

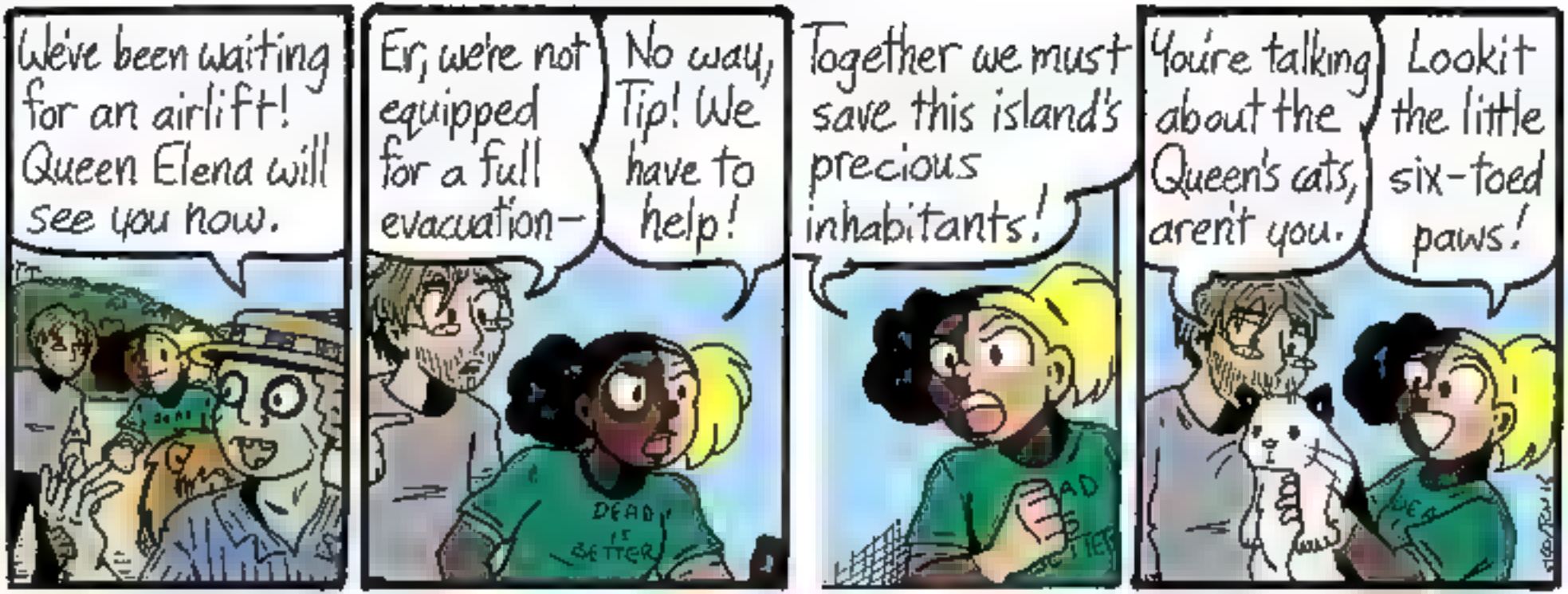

Unity! How's the Cypress?
Fine, now that I've moved her to safety!
Rock! You brought the pine guys! They'll love the Bitey swarm!
...swarm?
i...LiVE aGAiiiinNn...
gnar nar
gnar nar nar
So your definition of "fine"...
Ultra fine.

Nxic Breaker
Fxsy Armadillo
Swirling Sand

The Cypress is likely saved, yay. Let's get to Florida ahead of that hurricane.
I'm not sure.
The mirror universe was destroyed by an out-of-control Cypress swamp.
Pick a blooming side.
One minute it's "I'll do anything for nonhumans," the next it's "boo hoo, poor Homo sapiens."
Yes, the sublimation of all organic life is a "boo hoo" prospect.
Ain't got skin in the game. Ain't got skin.

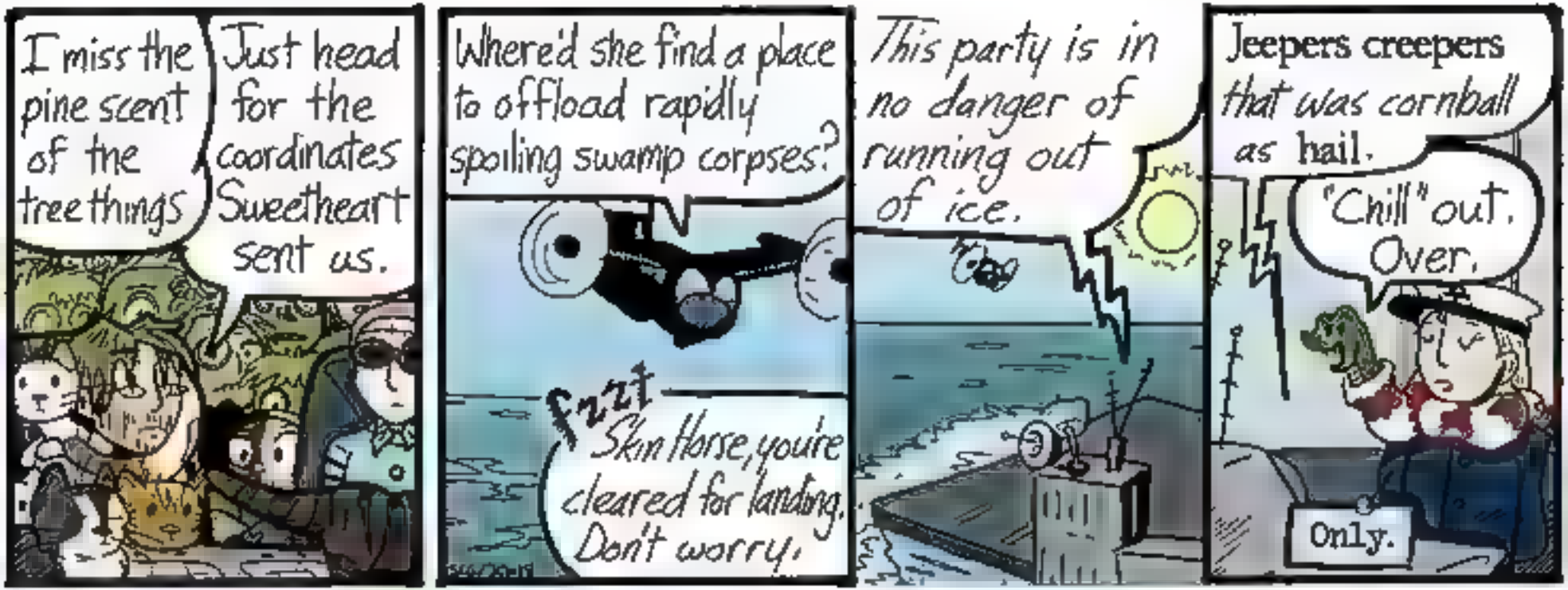
Good old Bad Island. Perfect putrefying weather.
Not for long. There's a hurricane coming.
Yeah, but it's still chill. Just a cool laid-back refuge for your walking-type zombies.
DEAD
SKRAAA!
erk!
"Skraaa." The sound of laid-back relaxation.
Oh, I'm ravening. But ravening with a tan.

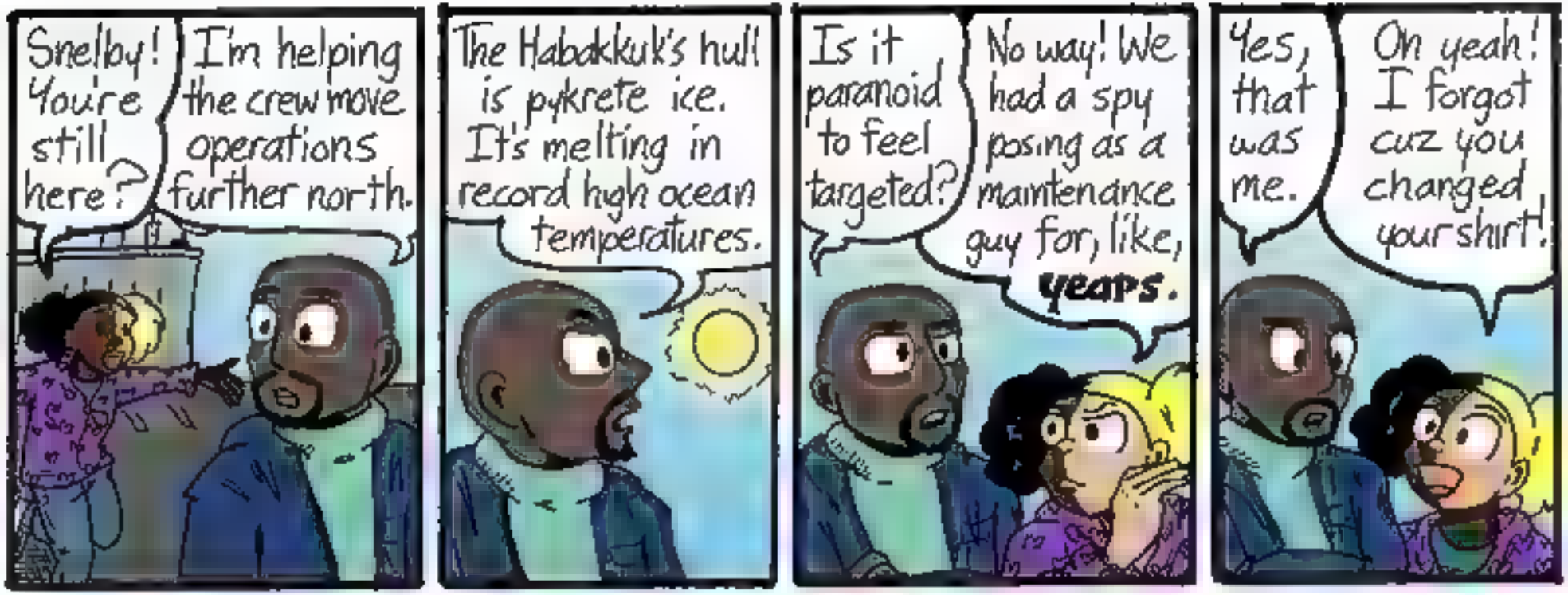

So, uh, what is this place?
Friggin' Bad Island! Second biggest undead settlement in the country!
DEAD IS BETTER
You'll love it! It's an island in the Florida Keys swarming with flesh-eating zombies!
DEAD IS BETTER
Why would I love that?
Plus it's got hurricanes!
The drink or the weather? Because that significantly affects—
Both! See, something for everyone!


We've been waiting for an airlift! Queen Elena will see you now.
Er, we're not equipped for a full evacuation—
No way, Tip! We have to help!
Together we must save this island's precious inhabitants!
You're talking about the Queen's cats, aren't you.
Lookit the little six-toed paws!

Your Majesty.
No need to kiss the royal feet. They've gone redolent.
Somehow yours is the only organization to answer our distress calls.
The whole country's gone reality blind! Most humans can't even see us!
This is serious.
All must be able to behold my magnificence.
You gotta up your vanity game, Tip. This is how it's done.

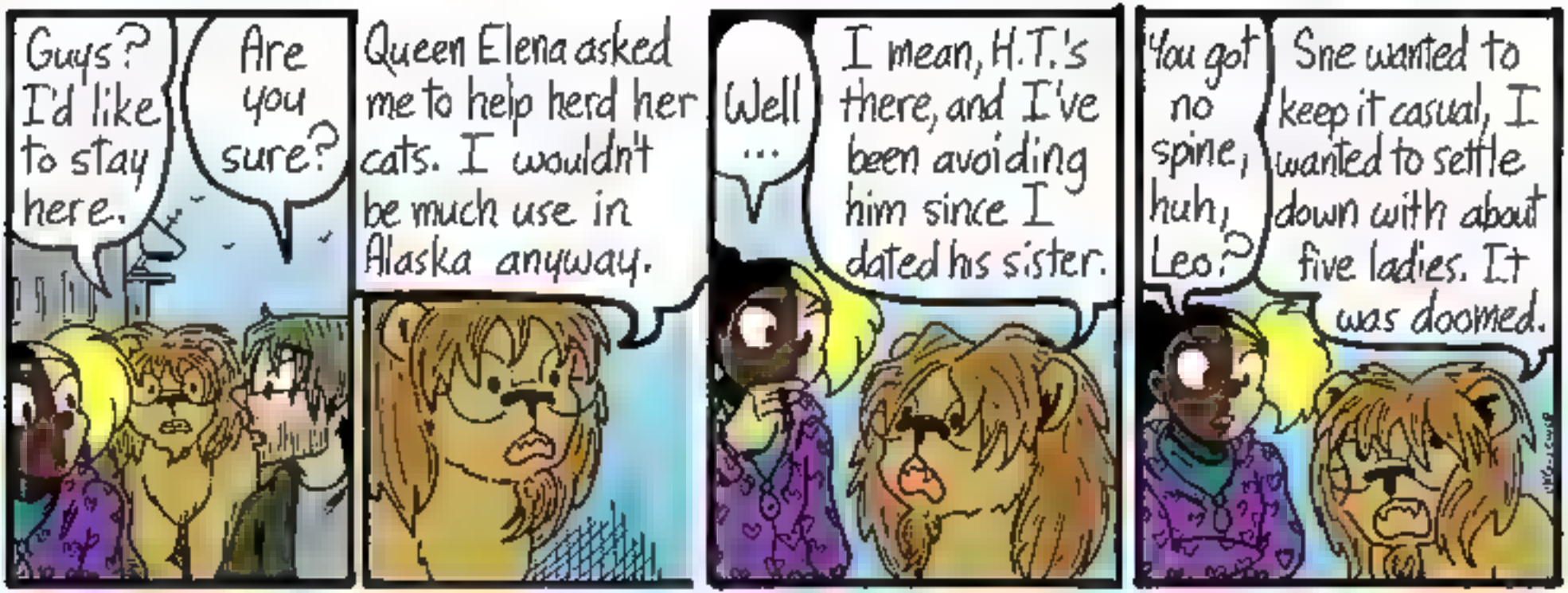
You are far less fabulous today, Tip.
I've had a rough patch.
Oh, but you mustn't neglect yourself.
I just don't have the time.
Nonsense. Only as a complete person can one have the strength to weather this storm.
Check it, guys! Some cats ran off with my legs!
Of course, the rules don't apply to Unity.
Of course.


I miss the pine scent of the tree things
Just head for the coordinates Sweetheart sent us.
Where'd she find a place to offload rapidly spoiling swamp corpses?
fzzt Skin Horse, you're cleared for landing. Don't worry.
This party is in no danger of running out of ice.
Jeepers creepers that was cornball as hail.
"Chill" out. Over.
Only.


Snelby! You're still here?
I'm helping the crew move operations further north.
The Habakkuk's hull is pykrete ice. It's melting in record high ocean temperatures.
Is it paranoid to feel targeted?
No way! We had a spy posing as a maintenance guy for, like, years.
Yes, that was me.
Oh yeah! I forgot cuz you changed your shirt!

You folks really think someone's manipulating the weather?
You must know superhumans with powers like that.
Of course not! That's scientifically absurd!
Can't you move things with your mind?
A glass of water, sure. A storm front, no.
You were in AG-I! The cream of humanity!
SHELBY! HELP! I SWALLOWED THE SHUFFLEBOARD PUCK!
Honestly, we're mostly good for punching stuff.
Still.

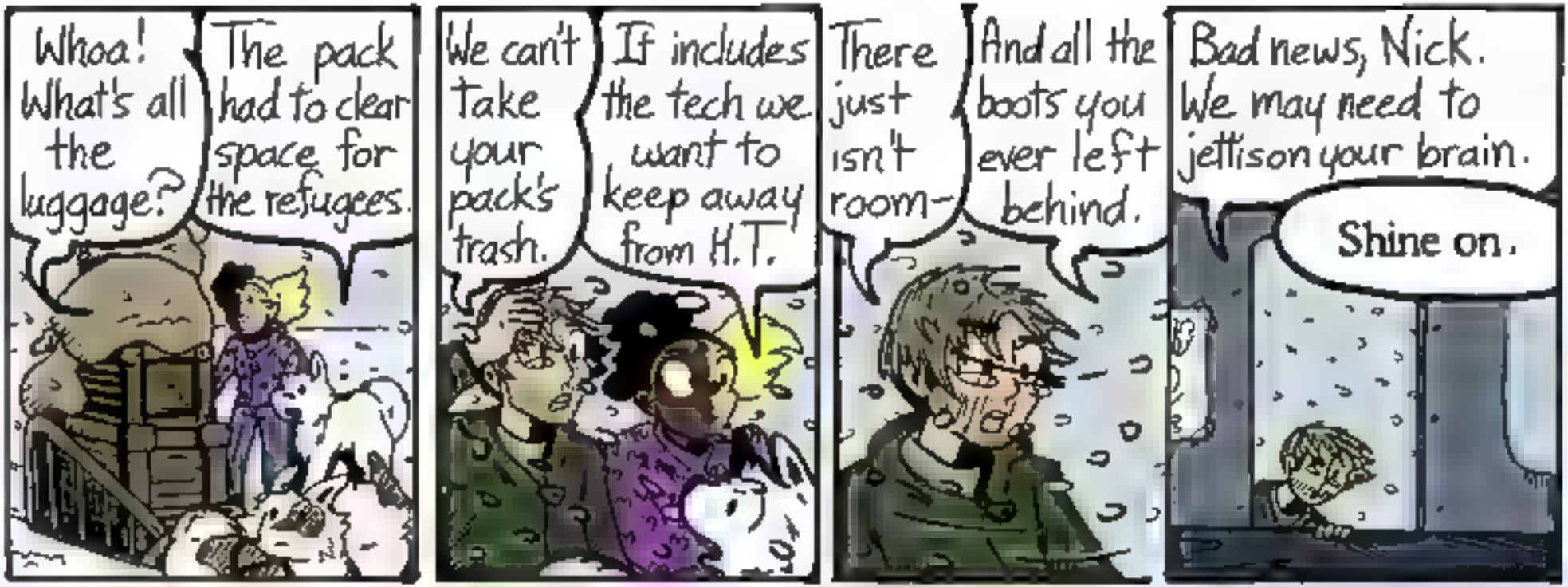
We've got Grillo Parlante tracking the weather, but I'm not holding my breath.
Don't underestimate those kids.
They've outsmarted both our teams before.
Guys! Jonah posted an update!
Here's me eating porcupine meatballs. Turns out I like porcupine!
Not sure what that says about our teams.
Man, now I want porcupine.

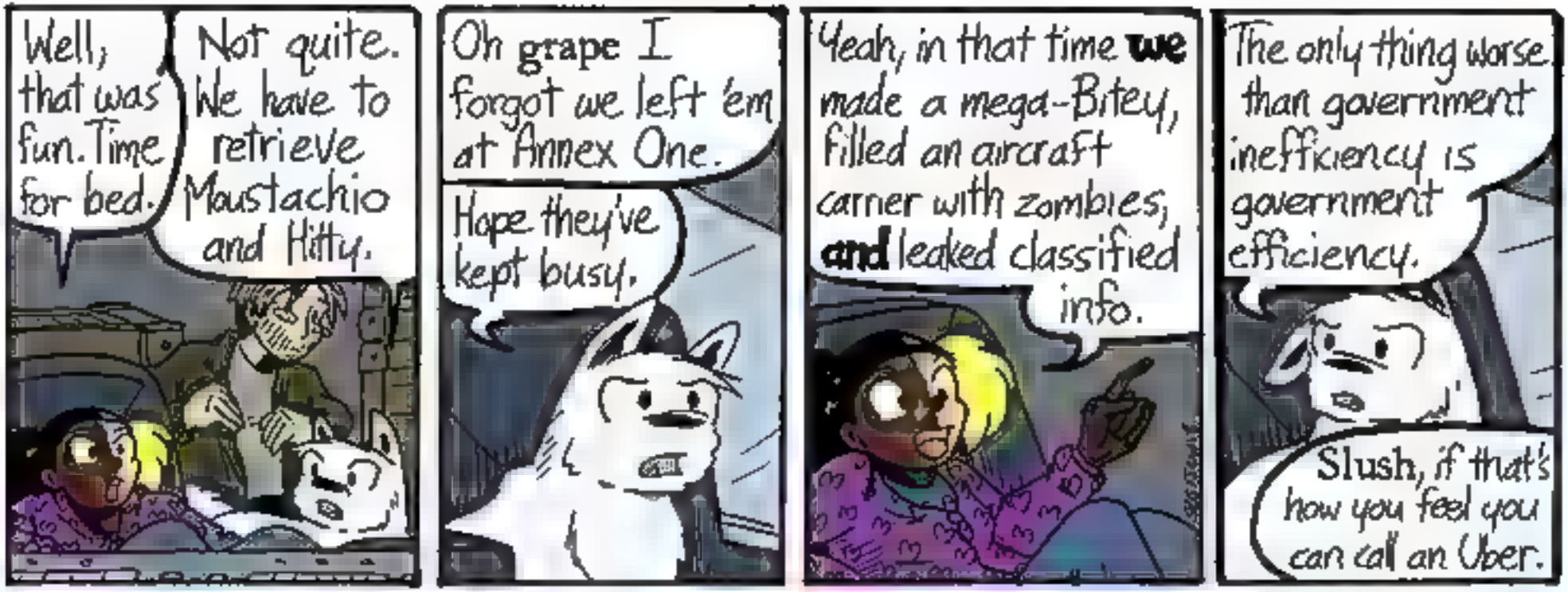

Guys? I'd like to stay here.
Are you sure?
Queen Elena asked me to help herd her cats. I wouldn't be much use in Alaska anyway.
Well ...
I mean, H.T.'s there, and I've been avoiding him since I dated his sister.
You got no spine, huh, Leo?
She wanted to keep it casual, I wanted to settle down with about five ladies. It was doomed.

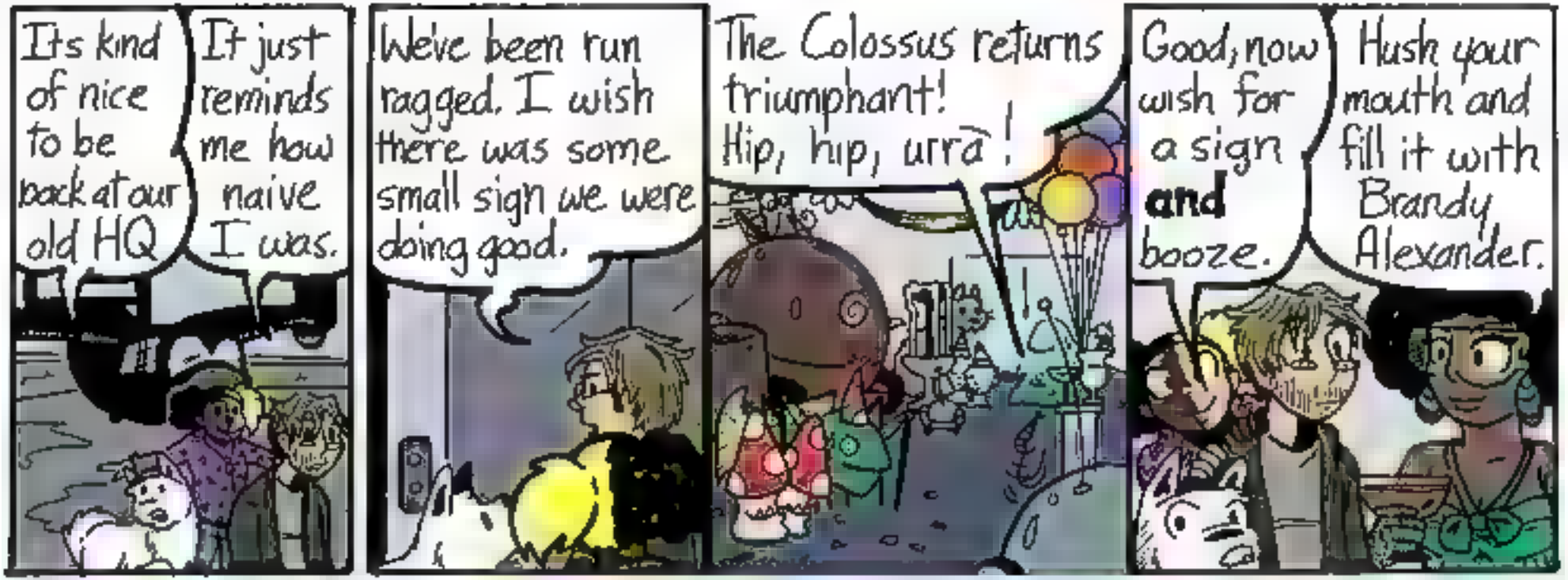
Thank you for this gift of the most magnificent of cats.
He's free to go with you, but he's not a gift.
No modesty! I shall match Skin Horse's generosity with the finest gift at my disposal.
Oh, well...
It's a scarf I borrowed from you. For anything else I'd have to unpack.
Wow, we came out ahead on this one.
Look at the mystery chunks her dudes left behind! I'mo eat for weeks!
Ew.

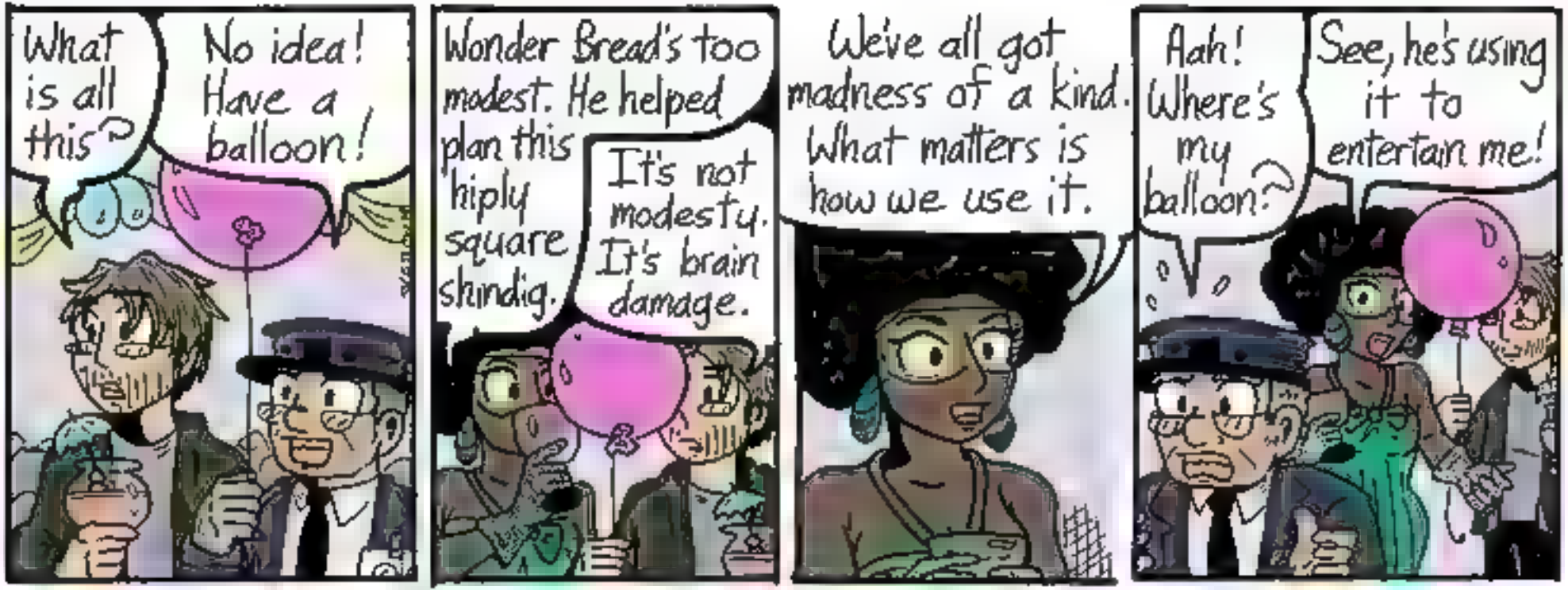
How'd the Florida mission go?
Better than expected. Are we finally out of the woods?
Let me check on- oh. No no no no. This is bad.
What?!
We've been out so long **all our timesheets are overdue.**
That's not a crisis.
I'll ignore that to focus on coordinating the Post-It tabs for our Timesheet Make-Up Grid.
Babe **lives** in the woods.

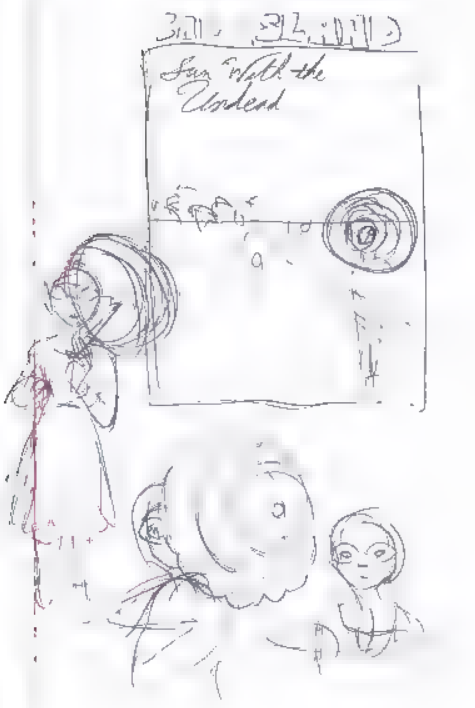
Babe! We survived!
It's good to see you too.
I made a list of stuff you're gonna be mad at me for.
It can wait.
Now that I'm self-actualized, I don't need to micromanage everything.
"1. Made a swarm of zombie hat babies."
Allow me to de-actualize a moment.


Whoa! What's all the luggage?
The pack had to clear space for the refugees.
We can't take your pack's trash.
If includes the tech we want to keep away from H.T.
There just isn't room-
And all the boots you ever left behind.
Bad news, Nick. We may need to jettison your brain.
Shine on.

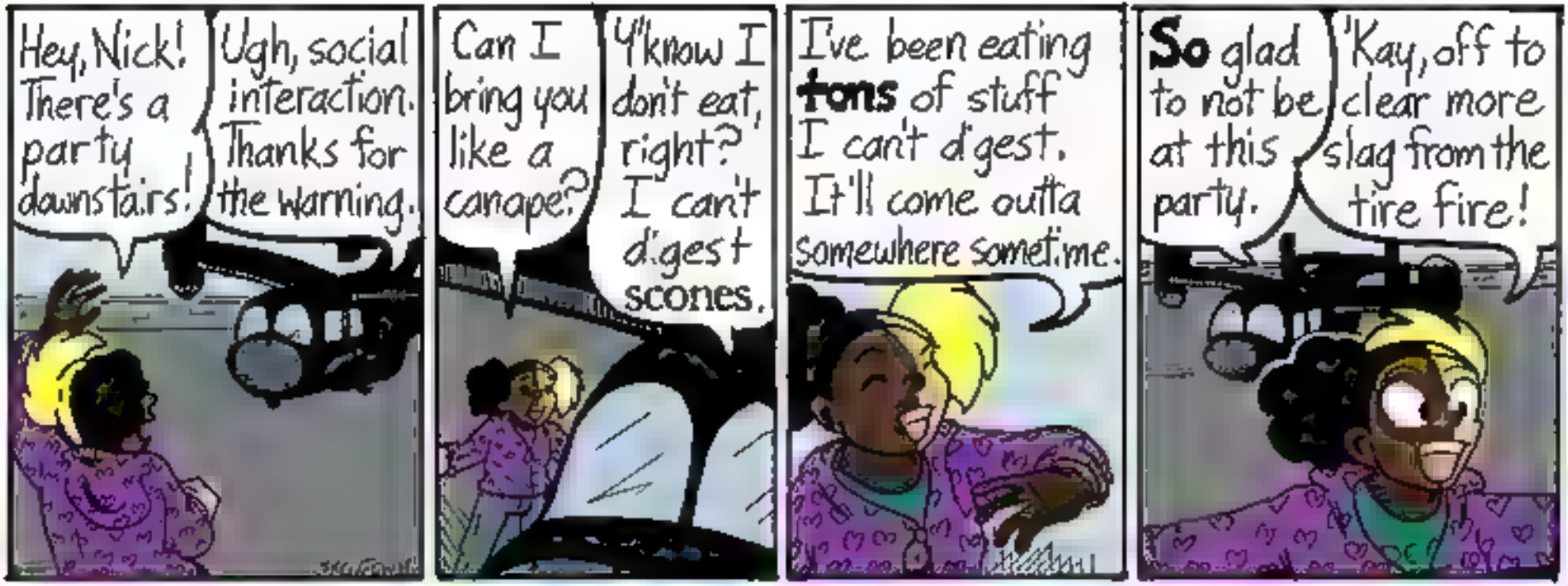

Well, that was fun. Time for bed.
Not quite. We have to retrieve Moustachio and Hitty.
Oh grape I forgot we left 'em at Annex One.
Hope they've kept busy.
Yeah, in that time we made a mega-Bitey, filled an aircraft carrier with zombies, and leaked classified info.
The only thing worse than government inefficiency is government efficiency.
Slush, if that's how you feel you can call an Uber.


Its kind of nice to be back at our old HQ
It just reminds me how naive I was.
We've been run ragged. I wish there was some small sign we were doing good.
The Colossus returns triumphant! Hip, hip, urra!
Good, now wish for a sign and booze.
Hush your mouth and fill it with Brandy Alexander.

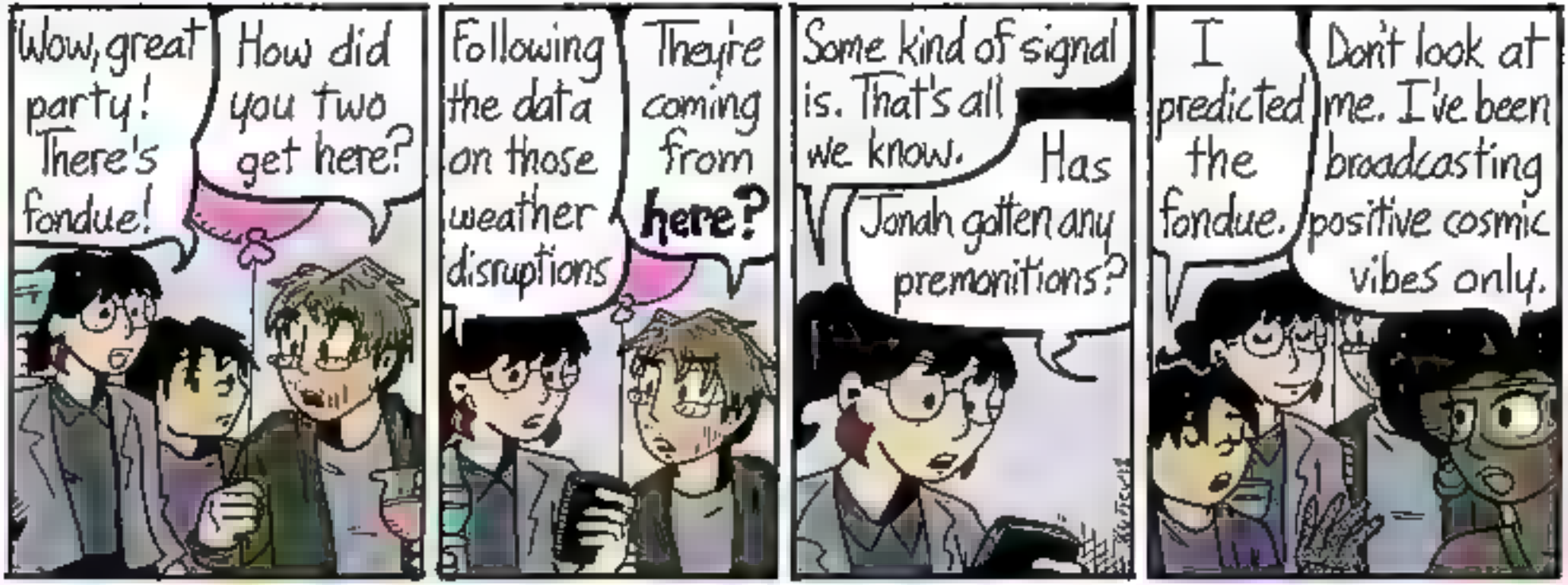

What is all this?
No idea! Have a balloon!
Wonder Bread's too modest. He helped plan this hiply square shindig.
It's not modesty. It's brain damage.
We've all got madness of a kind. What matters is how we use it.
Aah! Where's my balloon?
See, he's using it to entertain me!


Stay With the
Undead

This is unusually gracious of you.
Gotta demonstrate the benevolence of my reign.
Maybe we would be better off if you took over the world.
Of course! Peace, love, celebration...
...and vintage boho jewelry.
This is a naked attack on me.
You wish.


Hey, Nick! There's a party downstairs!
Ugh, social interaction. Thanks for the warning.
Can I bring you like a canape?
Y'know I don't eat, right? I can't digest scones.
I've been eating **tons** of stuff I can't digest. It'll come outta somewhere sometime.
So glad to not be at this party.
'Kay, off to clear more slag from the tire fire!

Did you manage to rebuild the Skin Horse files?
As far as Possible.
Alas, much was lost to the Flood.
AND HITTING.
Drat. That means Nick has the only full copy.
SOURCE OF HITTING REMAINS UNKNOWN + AT LARGE.
It's not great that Nick's our most trustworthy staffer, is it?
HITTY VOWS TO TRACK DOWN THE REAL HITTERS.


Wow, great party! There's fondue!
How did you two get here?
Following the data on those weather disruptions
They're coming from here?
Some kind of signal is. That's all we know.
Has Jonah gotten any premonitions?
I predicted the fondue.
Don't look at me. I've been broadcasting positive cosmic vibes only.

Ira, thanks for helping out.
I did what now?
Moustachio says you sorted the recovered files for him.
Ah, yes! Shame so much was lost.
At least we've still got Nick's backups.
I should've taken him from the start.
Hey! Aren't you shocked I'm a talking dog?

What the font—
Buttermilk pancakes.
klik

"I thought Oz was a great Head," said Dorothy.

"And I thought Oz was a lovely Lady," said the Scarecrow.

"And I thought Oz was a terrible Beast," said the Tin Woodman.

"And I thought Oz was a Ball of Fire," exclaimed the Lion.

"No, you are all wrong," said the little man meekly. "I have been making believe."

"Making believe!" cried Dorothy. "Are you not a Great Wizard?"

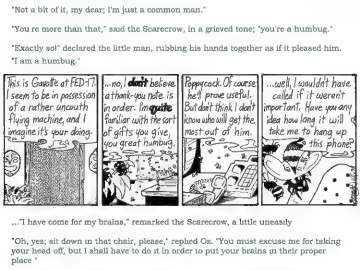
"Hush, my dear," he said. "Don't speak so loud, or you will be overheard –and I should be ruined. I'm supposed to be a Great Wizard."

"And aren't you?" she asked.

"Not a bit of it, my dear; I'm just a common man."

"You're more than that," said the Scarecrow, in a grieved tone; "you're a humbug."

"Exactly so!" declared the little man, rubbing his hands together as if it pleased him. "I am a humbug."



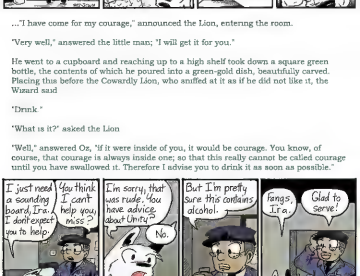
..."I have come for my brains," remarked the Scarecrow, a little uneasily

"Oh, yes; sit down in that chair, please," replied Oz. "You must excuse me for taking your head off, but I shall have to do it in order to put your brains in their proper place '

"That s all right," said the Scarecrow. "You are quite welcome to take my head off, as long as it will be a better one when you put it on again."

So the Wizard unfastened his head and emptied out the straw Then he entered the back room and took up a measure of bran, which he mixed with a great many pins and needles Having shaken them together thoroughly, he filled the top of the Scarecrow s head with the mixture and stuffed the rest of the space with straw, to hold it in place

When he had fastened the Scarecrow's head on his body again he said to him, "Hereafter you will be a great man, for I have given you a lot of bran new brains."



..."I have come for my courage," announced the Lion, entering the room.

"Very well," answered the little man; "I will get it for you."

He went to a cupboard and reaching up to a high shelf took down a square green bottle, the contents of which he poured into a green-gold dish, beautifully carved. Placing this before the Cowardly Lion, who sniffed at it as if he did not like it, the Wizard said

"Drink "

"What is it?" asked the Lion

"Well," answered Oz, "if it were inside of you, it would be courage. You know, of course, that courage is always inside one; so that this really cannot be called courage until you have swallowed it. Therefore I advise you to drink it as soon as possible."

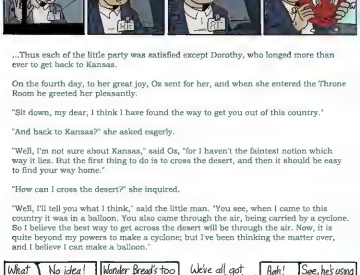
.. the Woodman entered and said, "I have come for my heart "

"Very well," answered the little man. "But I shall have to cut a hole in your breast, so I can put your heart in the right place I hope it won t hurt you."

"Oh, no," answered the Woodman. "I shall not feel it at all."

So Oz brought a pair of tinsmith s shears and cut a small, square hole in the left side of the Tin Woodman s breast. Then, going to a chest of drawers, he took out a pretty heart, made entirely of silk and stuffed with sawdust.

"Isn't it a beauty?" he asked.



...Thus each of the little party was satisfied except Dorothy, who longed more than ever to get back to Kansas.

On the fourth day, to her great joy, Oz sent for her, and when she entered the Throne Room he greeted her pleasantly.

"Sit down, my dear, I think I have found the way to get you out of this country."

"And back to Kansas?" she asked eagerly.

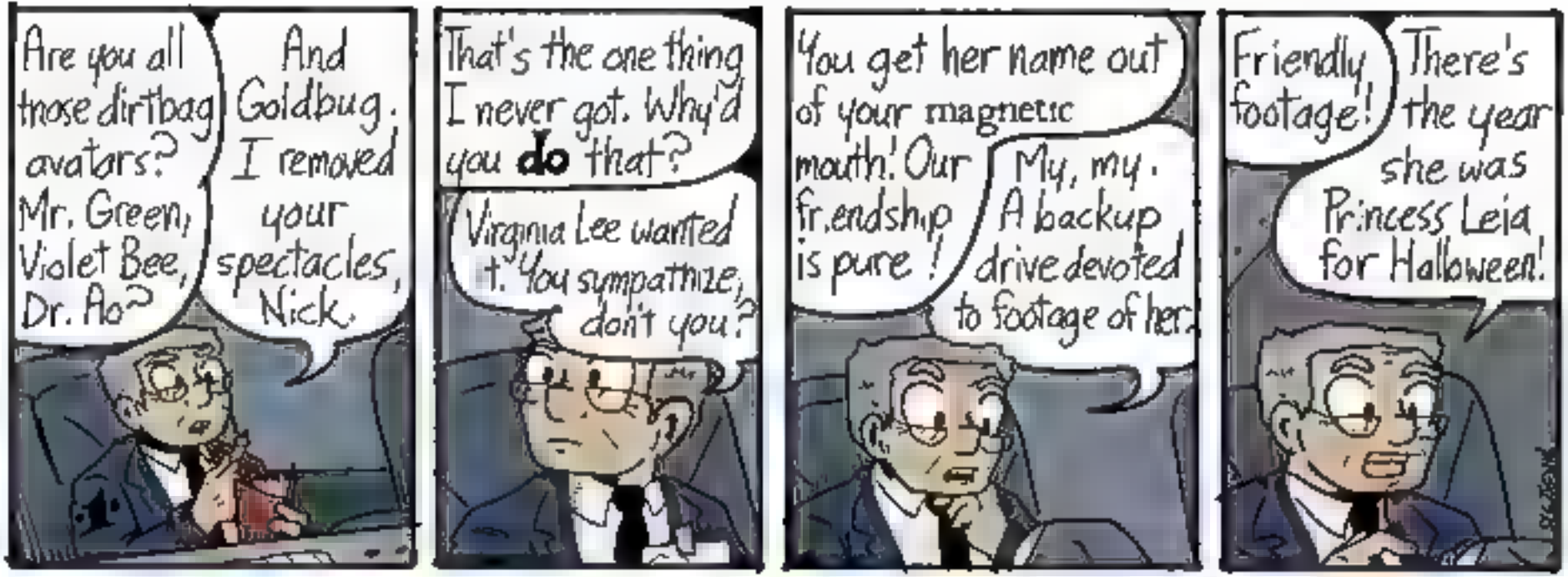
"Well, I'm not sure about Kansas," said Oz, "for I haven't the faintest notion which way it lies. But the first thing to do is to cross the desert, and then it should be easy to find your way home."

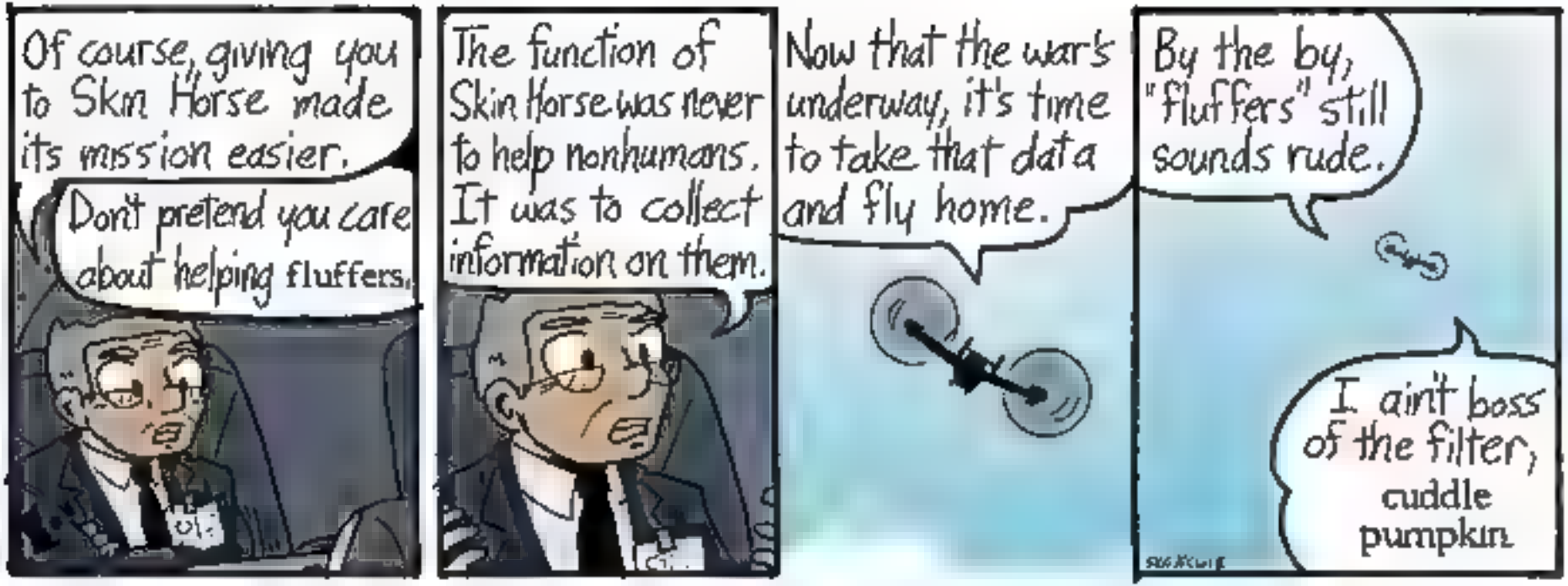
"How can I cross the desert?" she inquired.

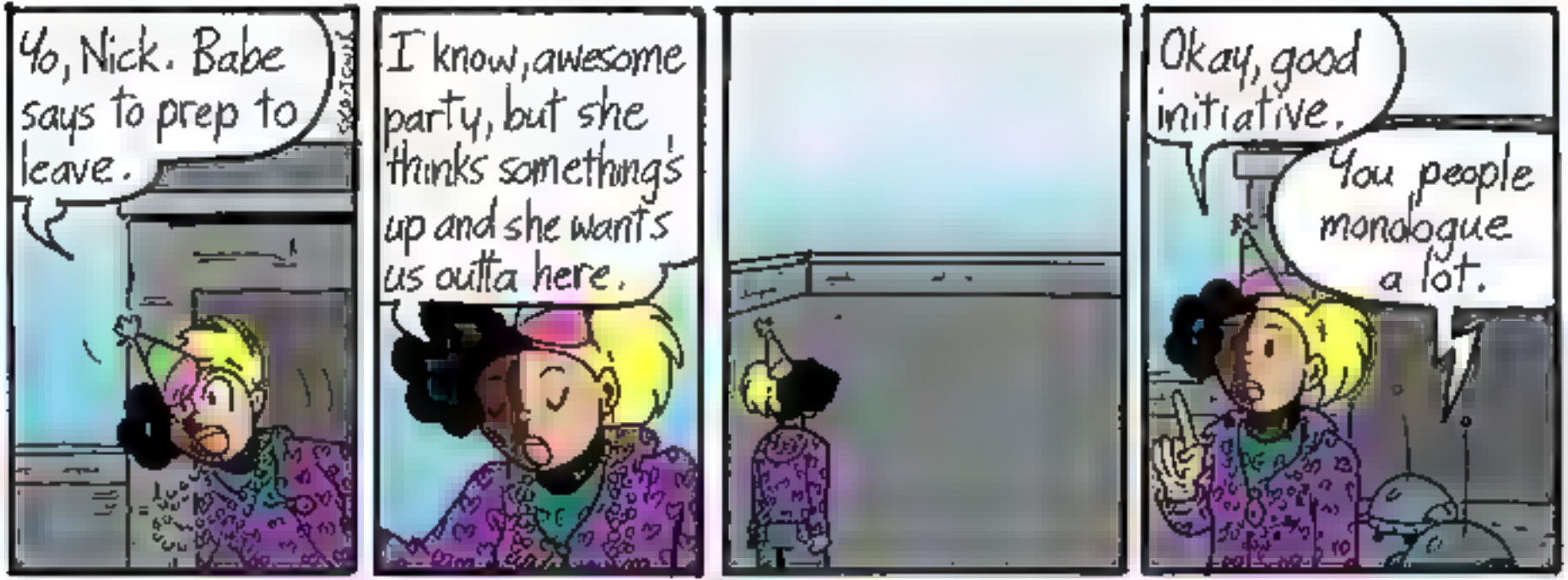
"Well, I'll tell you what I think," said the little man. "You see, when I came to this country it was in a balloon. You also came through the air, being carried by a cyclone. So I believe the best way to get across the desert will be through the air. Now, it is quite beyond my powers to make a cyclone; but I've been thinking the matter over, and I believe I can make a balloon."

Hrm... what's the code for the homing command?
I... I can't move...
Ah. "Rice Krispies." That woman...
What the turtle?
Calm down. I've simply disabled your free will.
That's evil.
Whoever will yell at video games now?
Oh, I'll keep streaming, butterfly You watch.

Kitty glitter stickers, don't tell me you've been a spy all this time.
I check in on my projects as needed.
You were there for actual years!
I had a dedicated computer to work on. It was relaxing.
This may be hard for you to understand, but in a way I'm more Ira Rosenkranz than I am Ari Green.
Which one of you shrieked every time Sweetheart gave you an instruction?
Team effort.


Are you all those dirtbag avatars? Mr. Green, Violet Bee, Dr. Ao?
And Goldbug. I removed your spectacles, Nick.
That's the one thing I never got. Why'd you do that?
Virginia Lee wanted it. You sympathize, don't you?
You get her name out of your magnetic mouth! Our friendship is pure!
My, my. A backup drive devoted to footage of her.
Friendly footage!
There's the year she was Princess Leia for Halloween!


Of course, giving you to Skin Horse made its mission easier.
Don't pretend you care about helping fluffers.
The function of Skin Horse was never to help nonhumans. It was to collect information on them.
Now that the war's underway, it's time to take that data and fly home.
By the by, "fluffers" still sounds rude.
I ain't boss of the filter, cuddle pumpkin


Yo, Nick. Babe says to prep to leave.
I know, awesome party, but she thinks something's up and she wants us outta here.
Okay, good initiative.
You people monologue a lot.

No word from Nick.
Ask Dr. Lee to find him. She's got to be good for more than making coffee.
Virginia's not volunteering. A-Sig clamped down on her free time.
Why does no one tell me these things?
My staff's disappearing and I need to get to the bottom of it!
'Cause they didn't do their timesheets, or 'cause no one's made fresh coffee?
I'm capable of genuine concern, darn it.

WEEK 1

STRIP ONE

PANEL ONE

(Tip unwinds to Nick after Niue's departure.)

Tip: Y'know, I'm gonna take today as a teaching moment.

Nick: Yeah, yeah. Quit [stitch]ing for a sec. Urgent message from Nera Vivaldi.

PANEL TWO

Tip: It's time I reconnect with the most genuine woman I know.

Nick: Nera's Anasigma hack has found the real Mr. Green. It's...

Ira. Ira was an agent all along.
An agent of what?
We already knew we had an Anasigma spy...
No! Not Ira! I like him!
He must've got kidnapped by whoever took Nick! He'll be all upset and scared!
I'll whisper armpit honey, you two-headed cat!
Yes, I'm quite frightened.

I'm not a bad man, Nick. Reality is more complicated than your video games.
I play games with moral complexity, platform.
Monsters are a fundamental threat to mankind.
You're just a freak, but you've met those who are more— smarter, stronger. The ones who could replace us.
Yeah cuz this 100% don't sound like what a game villain would say.
Then there are your coworkers, who just get on my nerves.

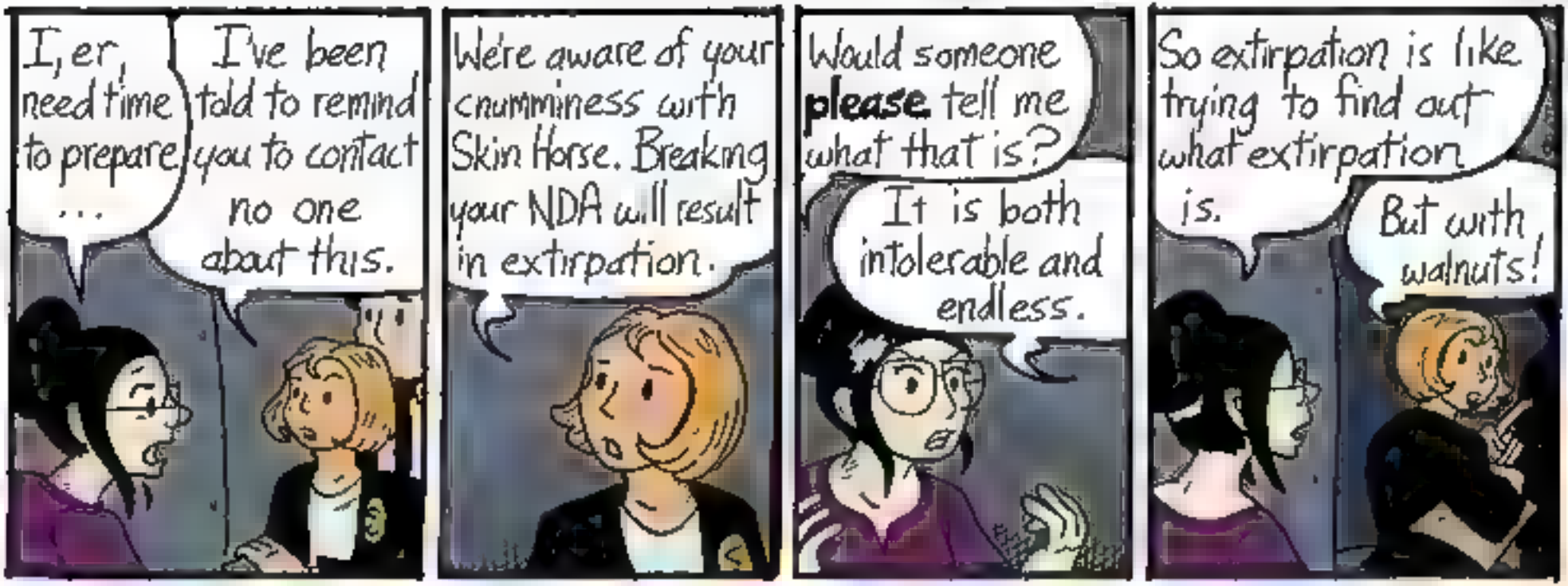
Two can play this game. See if Dr. Lee has info on A-Sig.
She's being monitored. I doubt we can get through to-
Virginia! We were just...
No, we can't reach N'ck either.
You need to speak with him? ... An emergency? Can't wait? ... Yes, I see...
She has opin'ions about a "Voltron" cartoon.
I'll take that.

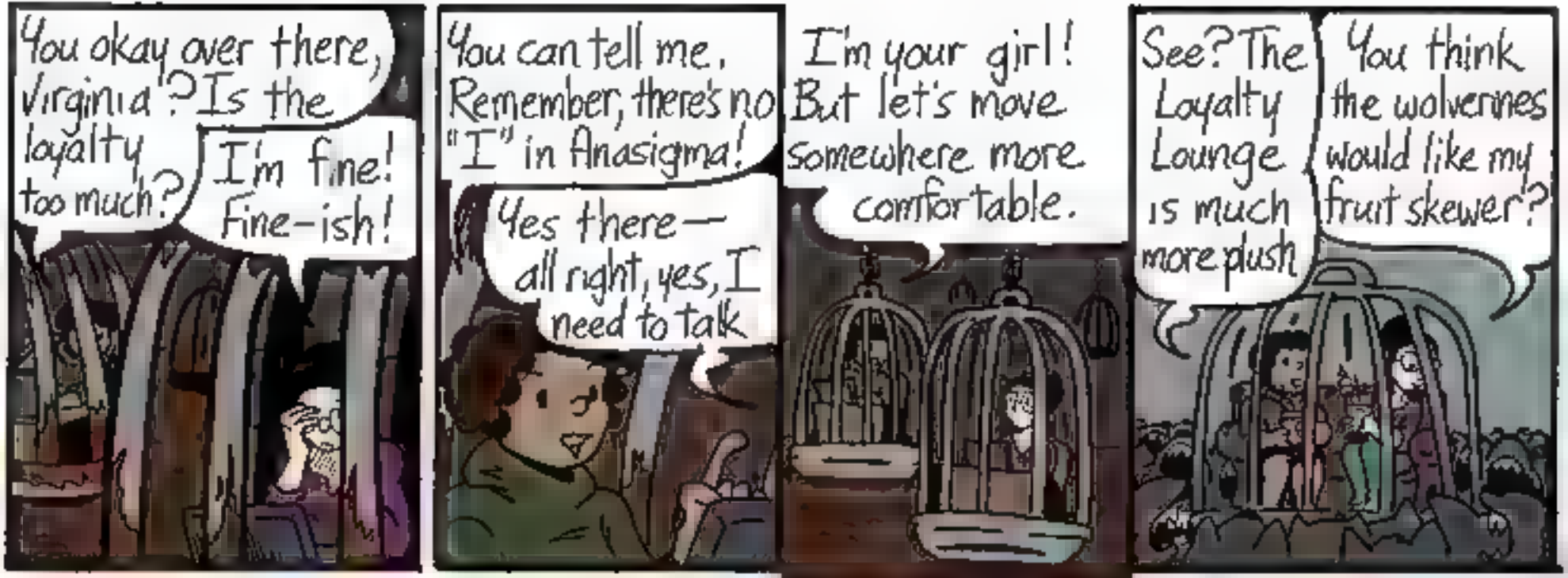
Nick's in trouble? I've got to get out of this acid pit!
Hang in there! We'll find a way to rescue you—
Oh, don't bother. This is the Loyalty Pit.
The what?
A torturous but voluntary workspace we use to prove our loyalty to Anasigma.
Why are you loyal to a place with acid pits?
I'm 14 hours away from getting a key to the Loyalty Restrooms!

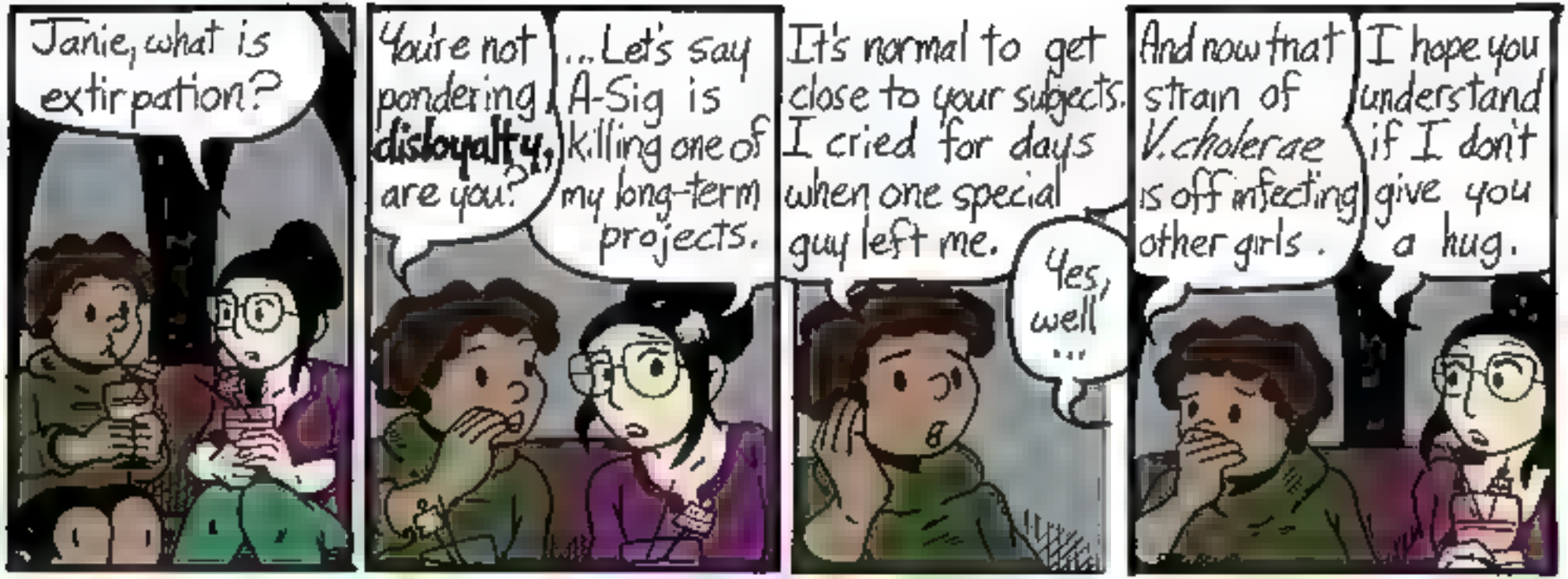
Even if Nick is here, I don't know where to look.
Do your best. You're our woman on the inside.
I'm not a spy! I can't live up to these expectations!
Calm down—
Nick's hidden somewhere and only I can save him and I don't have a clue —
Attention: Virginia Lee to Hangar Three to meet incoming aircraft.
Argh! So much pressure!
Drag yourself and your baggage to that hangar.

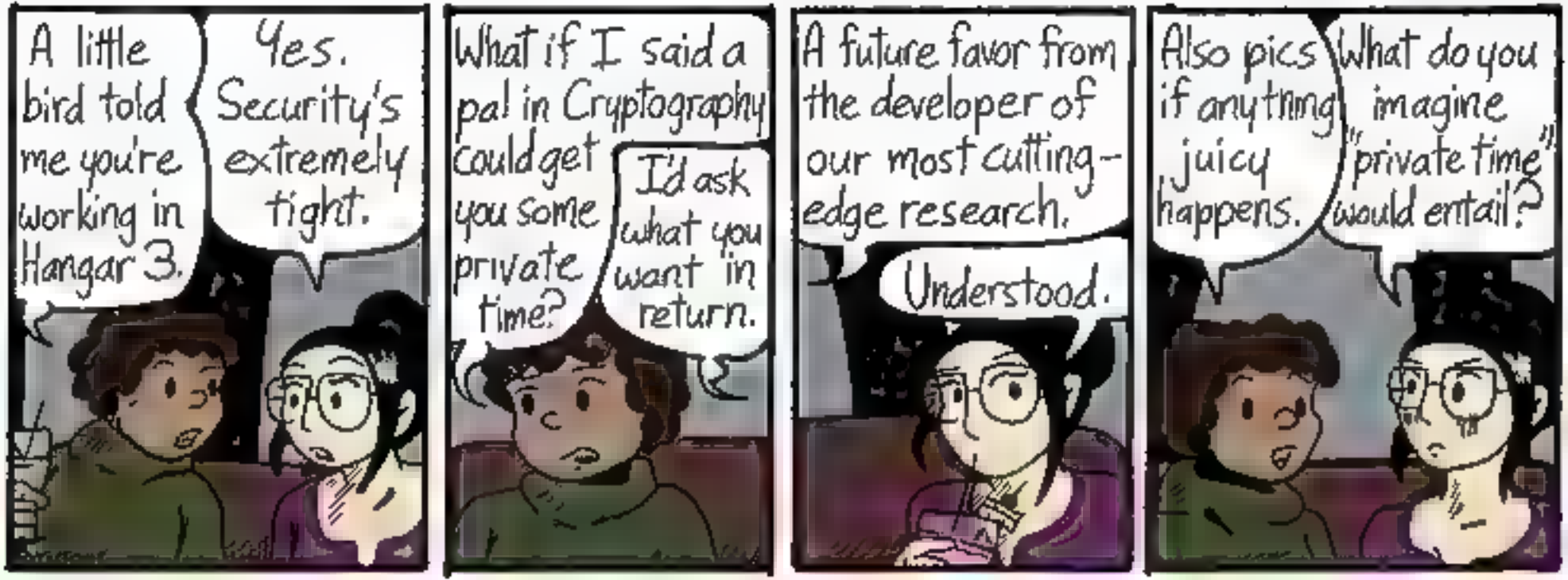
Ah, Dr. Lee, Mr. Green requested you.
Oh! How, er, flattering...
Your file says you've used the Loyalty Pits. Very good.
You can test my loyalty in any way! Snakes... fire..
We need your help to dismantle this aircraft.
They can be big snakes!
Says you're also prone to feeble misdirection.

The Whirligig project is officially closed. We've retrieved the onboard data and need you to salvage the hardware.
And the, ah, pilot?
The biological component has outlasted its usefulness. Don't you make the same mistake.
Pardon?
The higher-ups appreciate your R&D work. But now they have the weapons they need.
We've been prepping for war?
Your last project was reverse-engineering buzzsaw robots
Those have countless peacetime applications!


I, er, need time to prepare ...
I've been told to remind you to contact no one about this.
We're aware of your chumminess with Skin Horse. Breaking your NDA will result in extirpation.
Would someone **please** tell me what that is?
It is both intolerable and endless.
So extirpation is like trying to find out what extirpation is.
But with walnuts!


You okay over there, Virginia? Is the loyalty too much?
I'm fine! Fine-ish!
You can tell me. Remember, there's no "I" in Anasigma!
Yes there— all right, yes, I need to talk
I'm your girl! But let's move somewhere more comfortable.
See? The Loyalty Lounge is much more plush
You think the wolverines would like my fruit skewer?


Janie, what is extirpation?
You're not pondering disloyalty, are you?
...Let's say A-Sig is killing one of my long-term projects.
It's normal to get close to your subjects. I cried for days when one special guy left me.
Yes, well...
And now that strain of V. cholerae is off infecting other girls.
I hope you understand if I don't give you a hug.


A little bird told me you're working in Hangar 3.
Yes. Security's extremely tight.
What if I said a pal in Cryptography could get you some private time?
I'd ask what you want in return.
A future favor from the developer of our most cutting-edge research.
Understood.
Also pics if anything juicy happens.
What do you imagine "private time" would entail?

Janie, I'm trusting you because it's my sole hope of saving Nick.
If this offer isn't legitimate, give me a sign. Something. Anything.
AND SO.
There's the traitor! Take her away!
A meaningful eye twitch! Is that so much to ask?

Dear Gilly

...ma landscaper at a popular theme park licensed property destination ...contractually restricted from identifying by name lately the place has become infested with Zombie Gnomes. The staff has tried ...disguise the problem by dressing them in tiny costumes and passing them off as dwarves and friendly cartoon characters.

...last night however they ate the floral clock ...'d been tending all year. And a churro stand. And two people working at the churro stand. But mostly the floral clock.

Should ... continue to practice defensive gardening to protect the park or start ...ne to get offensive?

Priyanka

P.S. We also found a guy named Dave tied up and dangling from the model Eiffel Tower in one of our popular musical doll-based rides. He seems all right except that he won't stop humming the theme song.

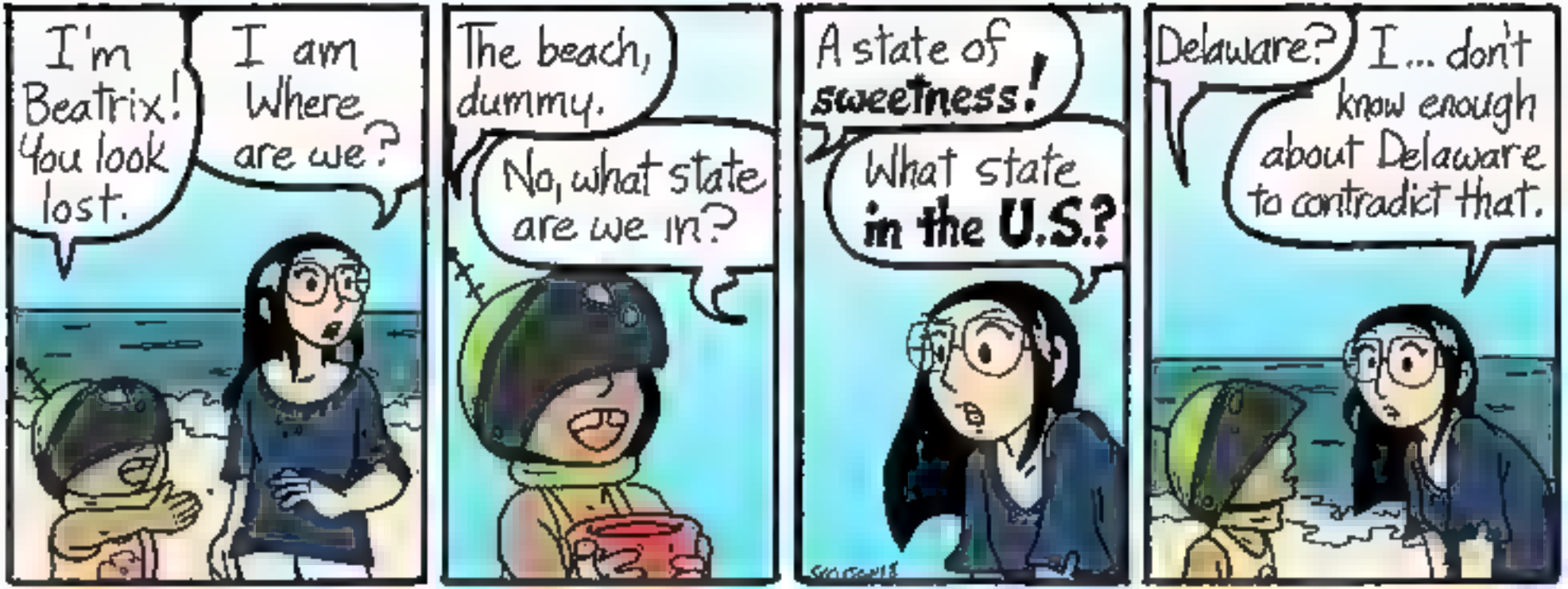
Dear Priyanka,

Offend away. Offend with *fire*. And send Dave to me. I shall train him as a warrior and possibly as my concubine. Our army grows strong and fat with vengeance.

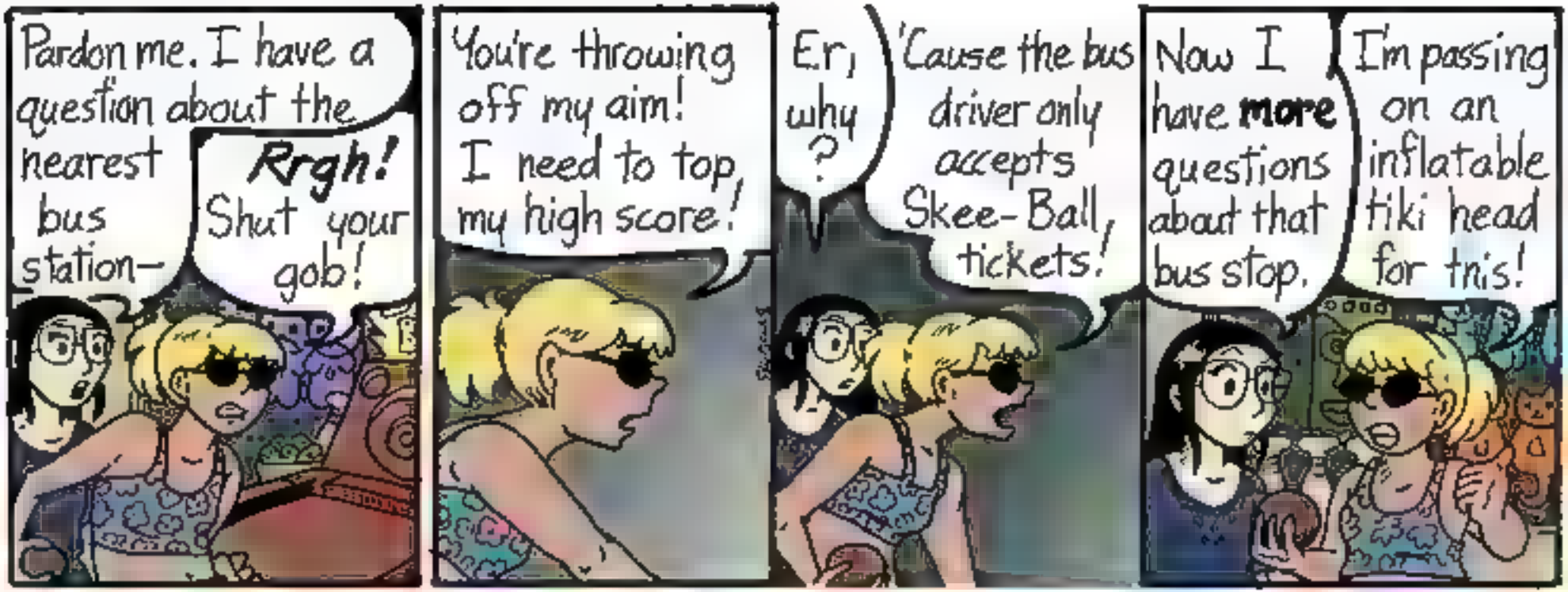
Gilly

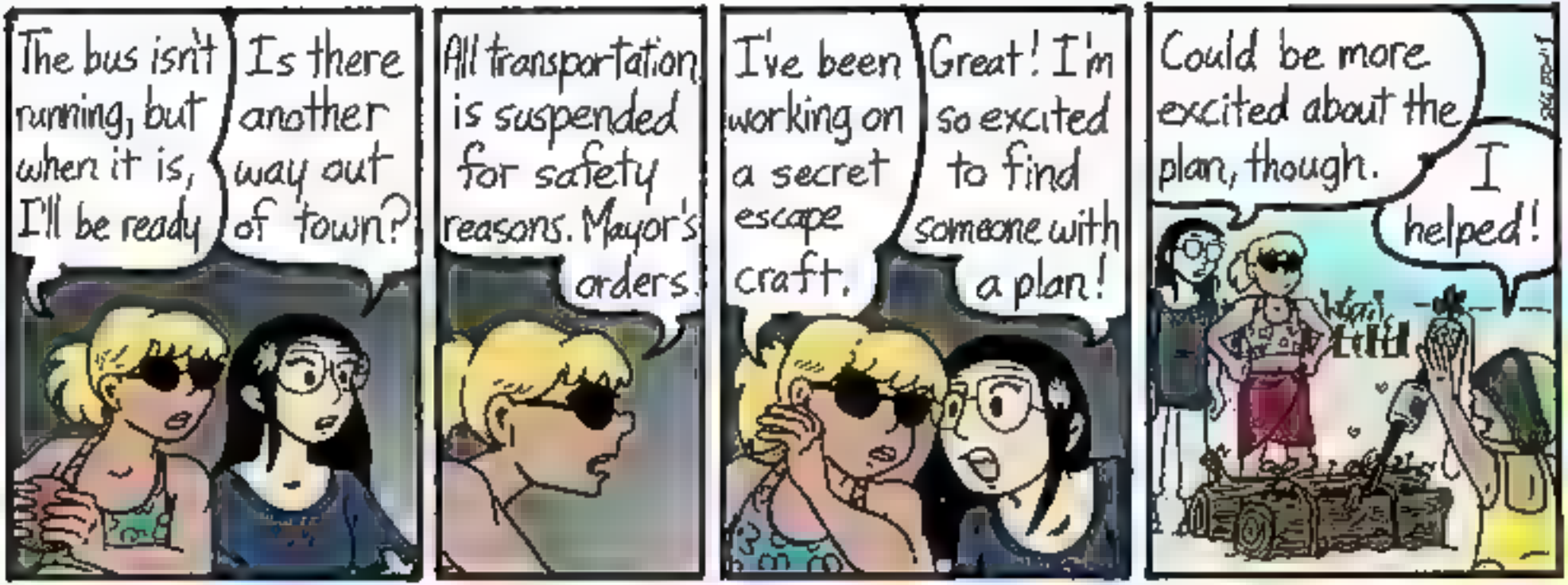
P.S. But don't forget to winterize your vegetable beds, folks.

Ugh. Stupid evil lunch buddy...
Is this... extirpation?
I suppose it's horrific to be lost in an endless expanse of sand...
...and water..
...quaint beachfront property...
There's Skee-Ball down at the boardwalk.

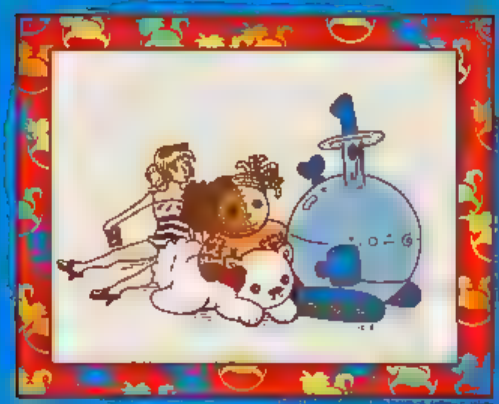

I'm Beatrix! You look lost.
I am Where are we?
The beach, dummy.
No, what state are we in?
A state of sweetness!
What state in the U.S.?
Delaware?
I... don't know enough about Delaware to contradict that.

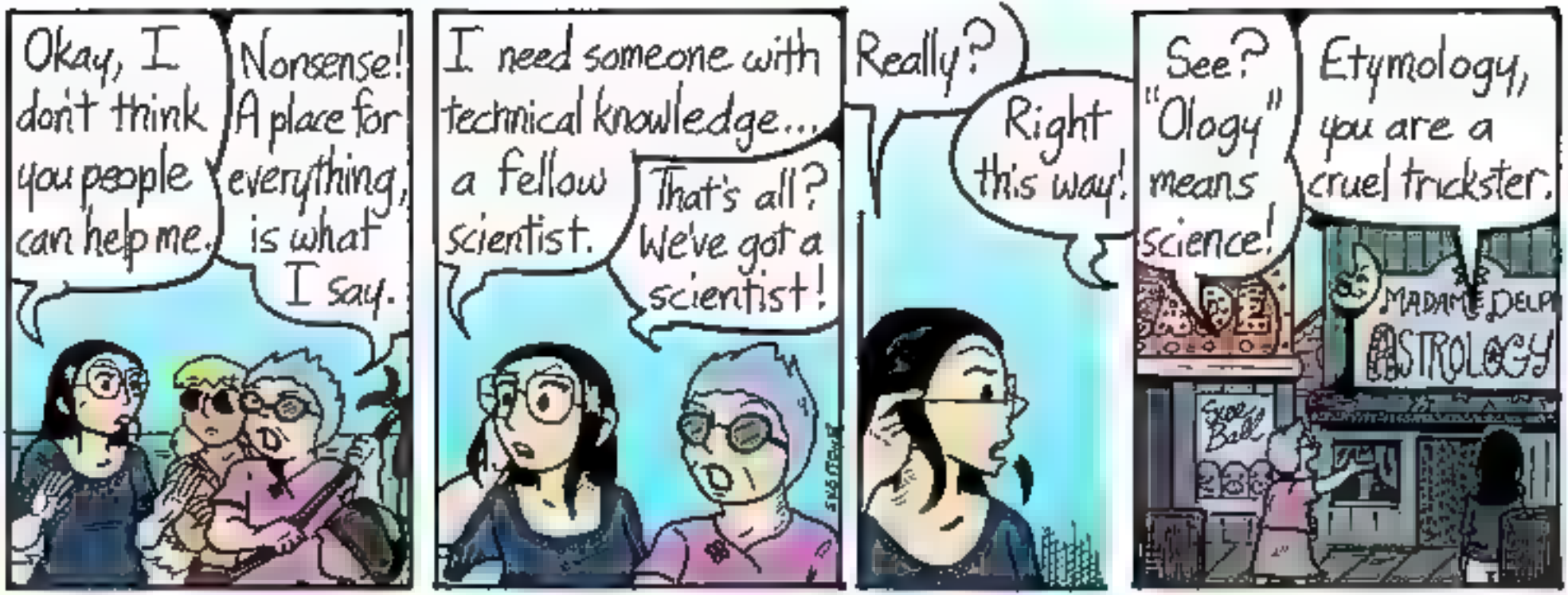
What are you doing here?
My whole family's here. Dunno why.
I thought I was going to a place of ultimate punishment.
This is better, right?
No, I need to get out.
Let's see Melanie! She knows all about getting out!
Get out, Beatrix.
See? It's all she talks about!
SKEE BALL

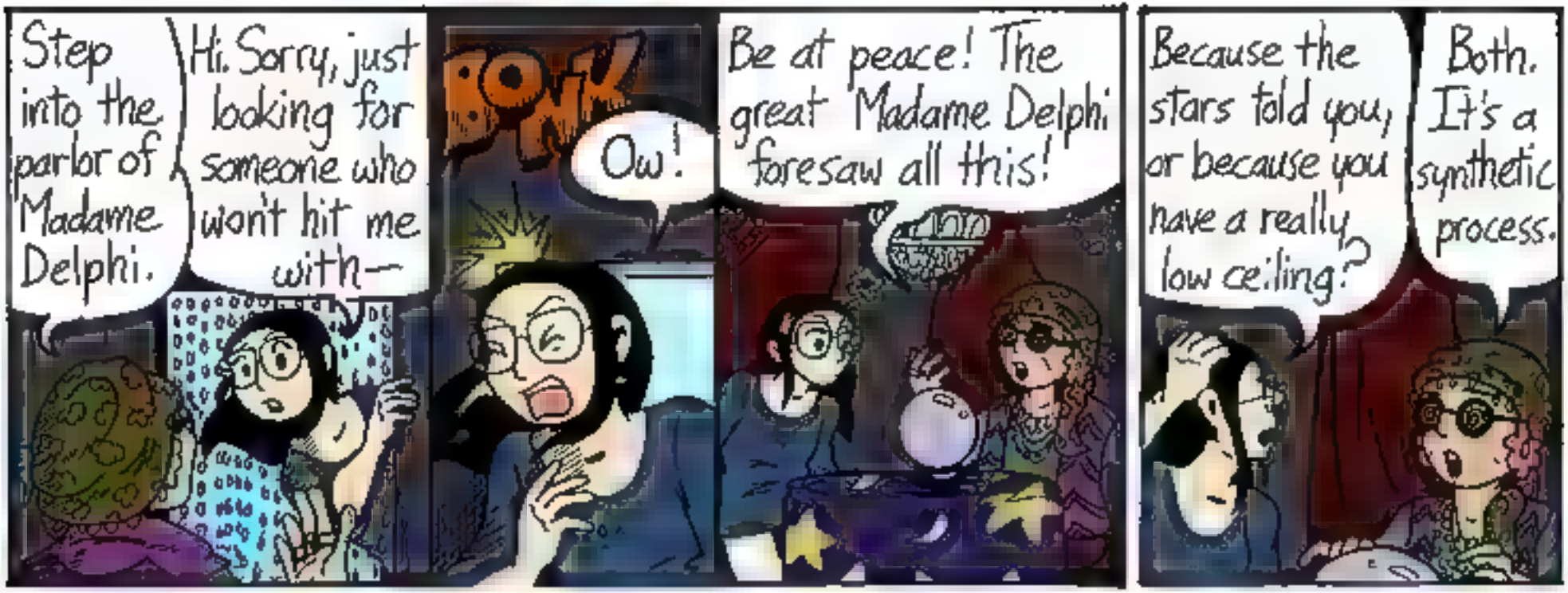

Pardon me. I have a question about the nearest bus station—
Rrgh! Shut your gob!
You're throwing off my aim! I need to top my high score!
Er, why?
'Cause the bus driver only accepts Skee-Ball tickets!
Now I have more questions about that bus stop.
I'm passing on an inflatable tiki head for this!

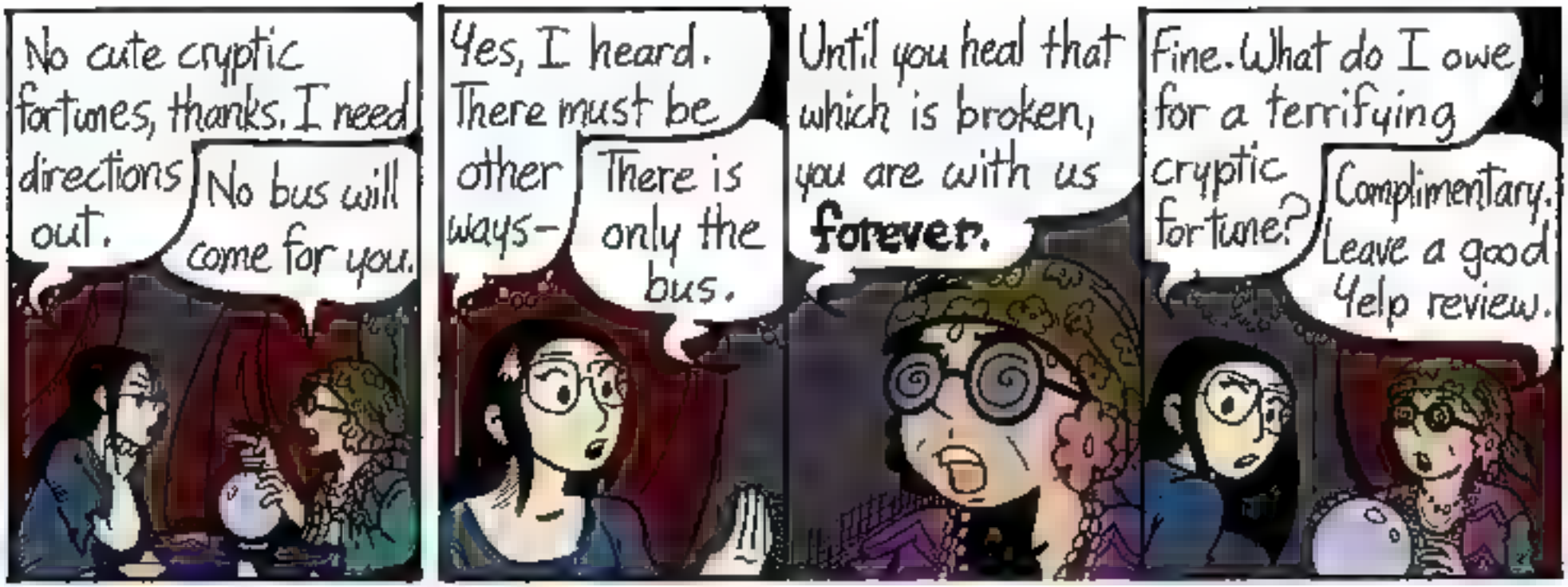

The bus isn't running, but when it is, I'll be ready
Is there another way out of town?
All transportation is suspended for safety reasons. Mayor's orders.
I've been working on a secret escape craft.
Great! I'm so excited to find someone with a plan!
Could be more excited about the plan, though.
I helped!

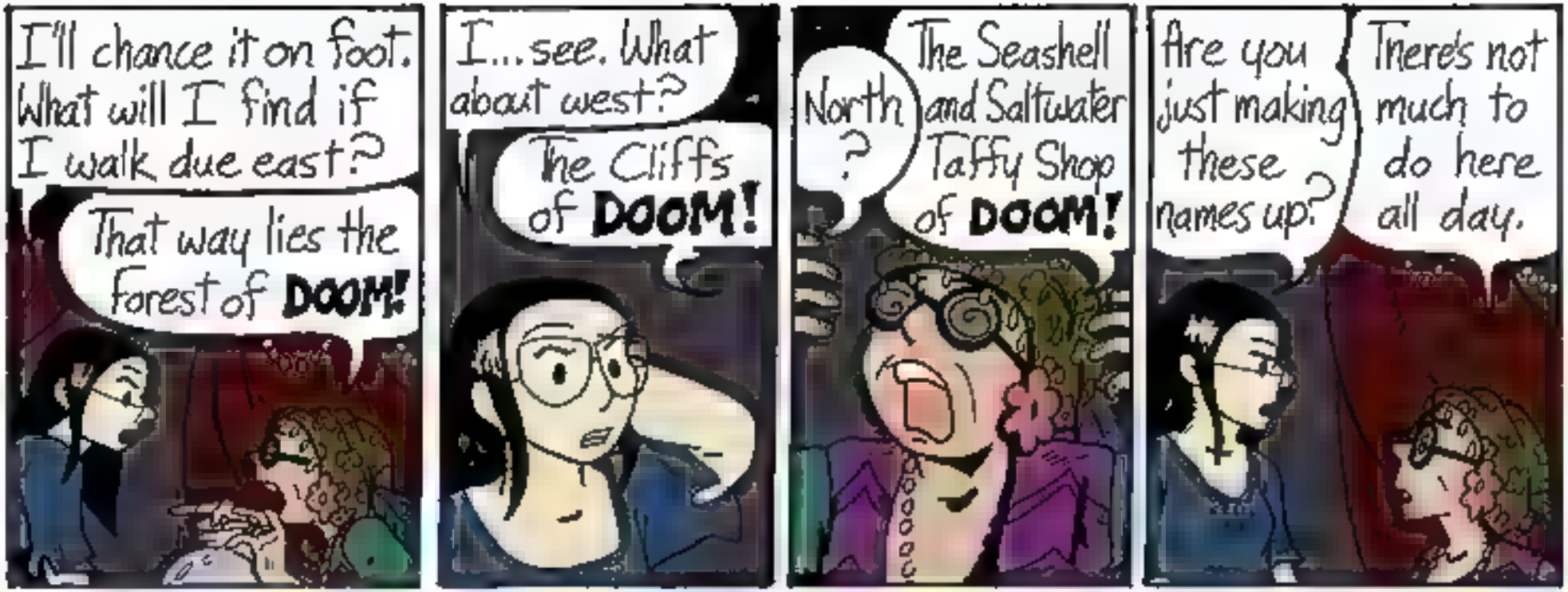
What are you doing?
Oh, butts, it's Mrs. Ape.
Hey! My literal minutes of work!
We must maintain order! Also tidiness!
GRAB!
I just need to get the heck out of here.
Well, we'll see how far that potty mouth gets you.
I was wrong. This is horror.
I left my gum in your hair.




Okay, I don't think you people can help me.
Nonsense! A place for everything, is what I say.
I need someone with technical knowledge... a fellow scientist.
That's all? We've got a scientist!
Really?
Right this way!
See? "Ology" means science!
Etymology, you are a cruel trickster.
MADAME DELPHI
ASTROLOGY
Shoe Ball


Step into the parlor of Madame Delphi.
Hi. Sorry, just looking for someone who won't hit me with—
POW!
Ow!
Be at peace! The great Madame Delphi foresaw all this!
Because the stars told you, or because you have a really low ceiling?
Both. It's a synthetic process.

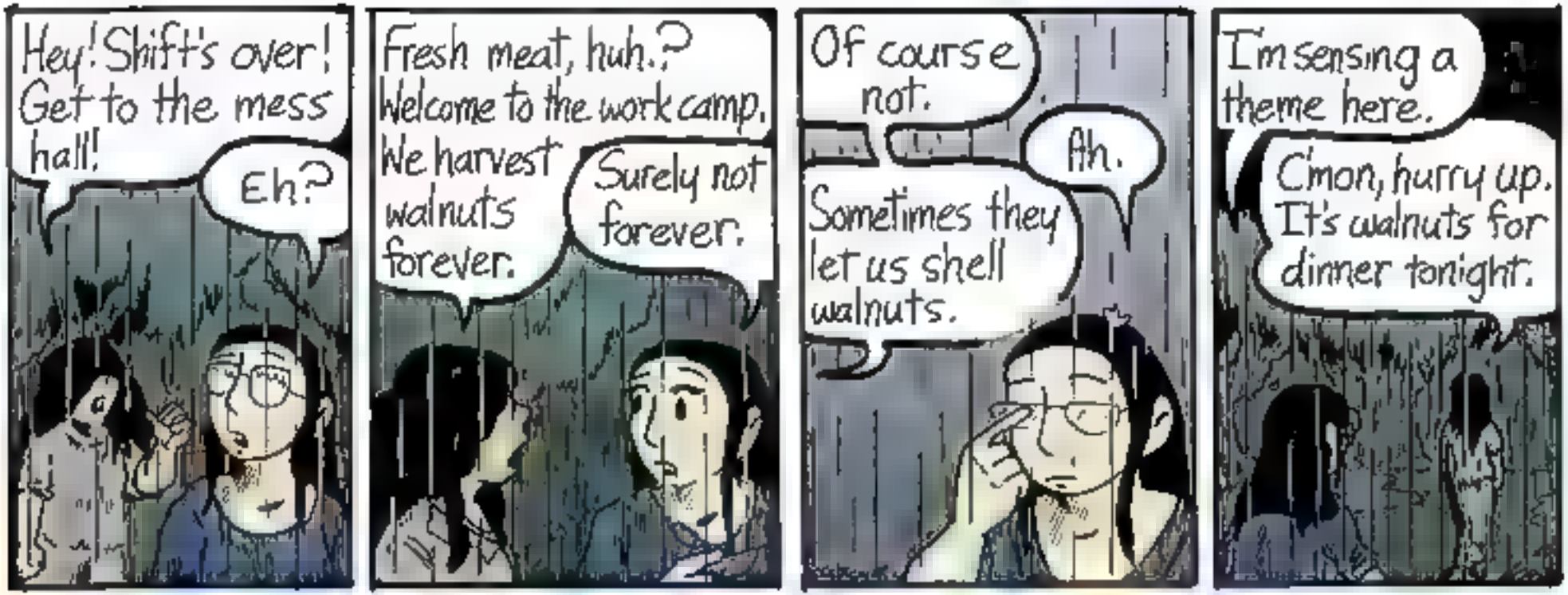

No cute cryptic fortunes, thanks. I need directions out.
No bus will come for you.
Yes, I heard. There must be other ways-
There is only the bus.
Until you heal that which is broken, you are with us forever.
Fine. What do I owe for a terrifying cryptic fortune?
Complimentary. Leave a good Yelp review.

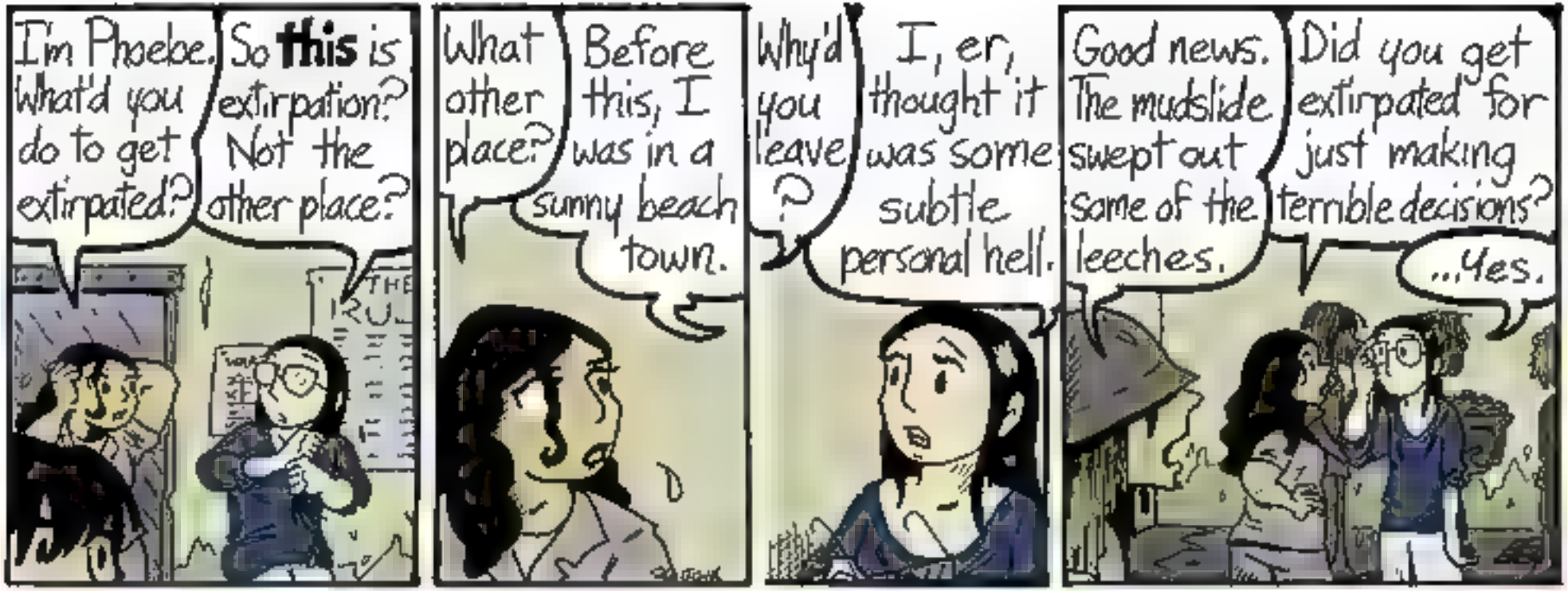

I'll chance it on foot. What will I find if I walk due east?
That way lies the Forest of DOOM!
I... see. What about west?
The Cliffs of DOOM!
North?
The Seashell and Saltwater Taffy Shop of DOOM!
Are you just making these names up?
There's not much to do here all day.

Someone cut corners on this forest. All the trees are the same. Looks like—
bonk
Ow!
Walnut.
FOR THE RECORD, EXTIRPATION HAS ME DEEPLY UNIMPRESSED.

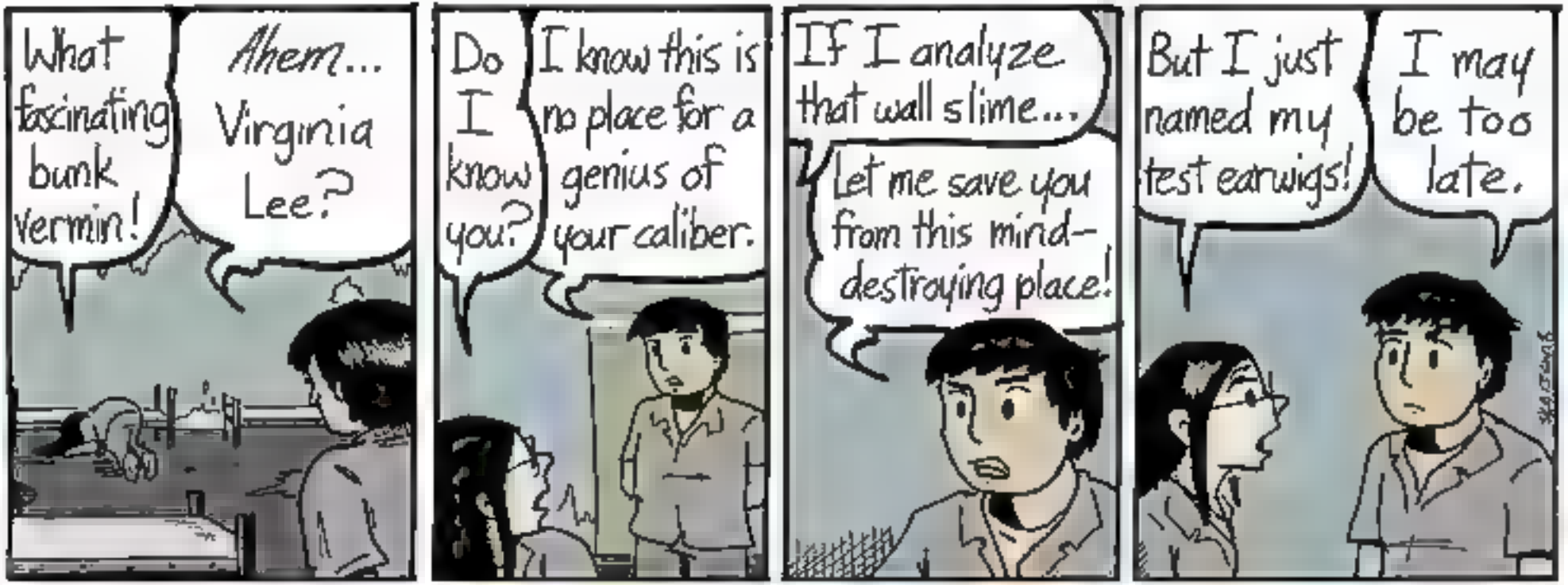
tromp tromp tromp
KRAK
TOK
SHAAAAA
OKAY, THIS IS GETTING TORTUROUS.

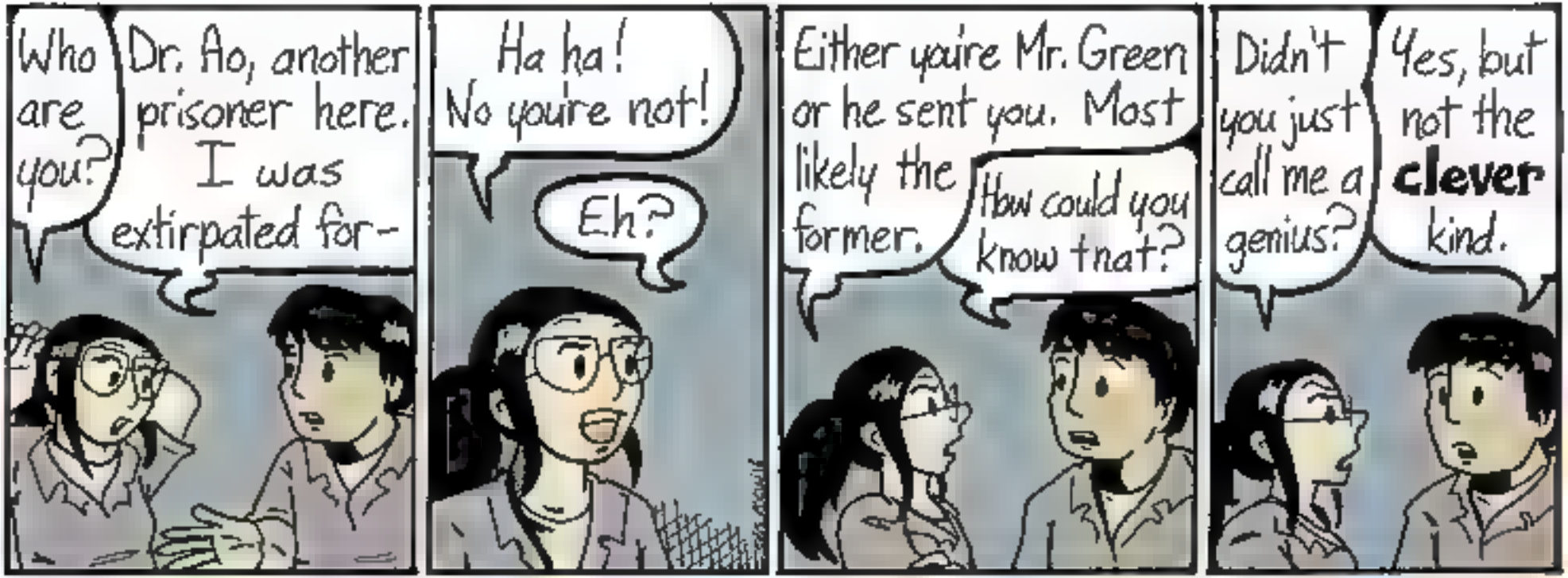
1
UP


Hey! Shift's over! Get to the mess hall!
Eh?
Fresh meat, huh.? Welcome to the work camp. We harvest walnuts forever.
Surely not forever.
Of course not.
Sometimes they let us shell walnuts.
Ah.
I'm sensing a theme here.
C'mon, hurry up. It's walnuts for dinner tonight.

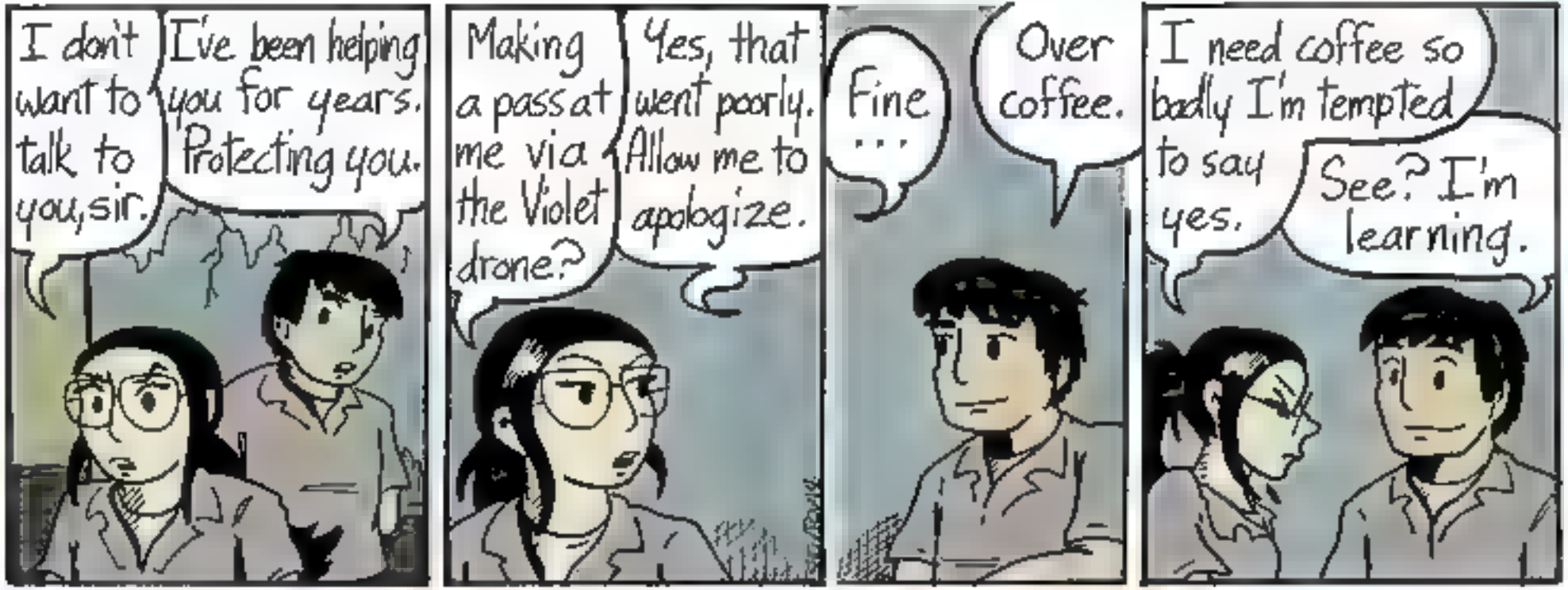

I'm Phoebe. What'd you do to get extirpated?
So this is extirpation? Not the other place?
What other place?
Before this, I was in a sunny beach town.
Why'd you leave?
I, er, thought it was some subtle personal hell.
Good news. The mudslide swept out some of the leeches.
Did you get extirpated for just making terrible decisions?
...Yes.

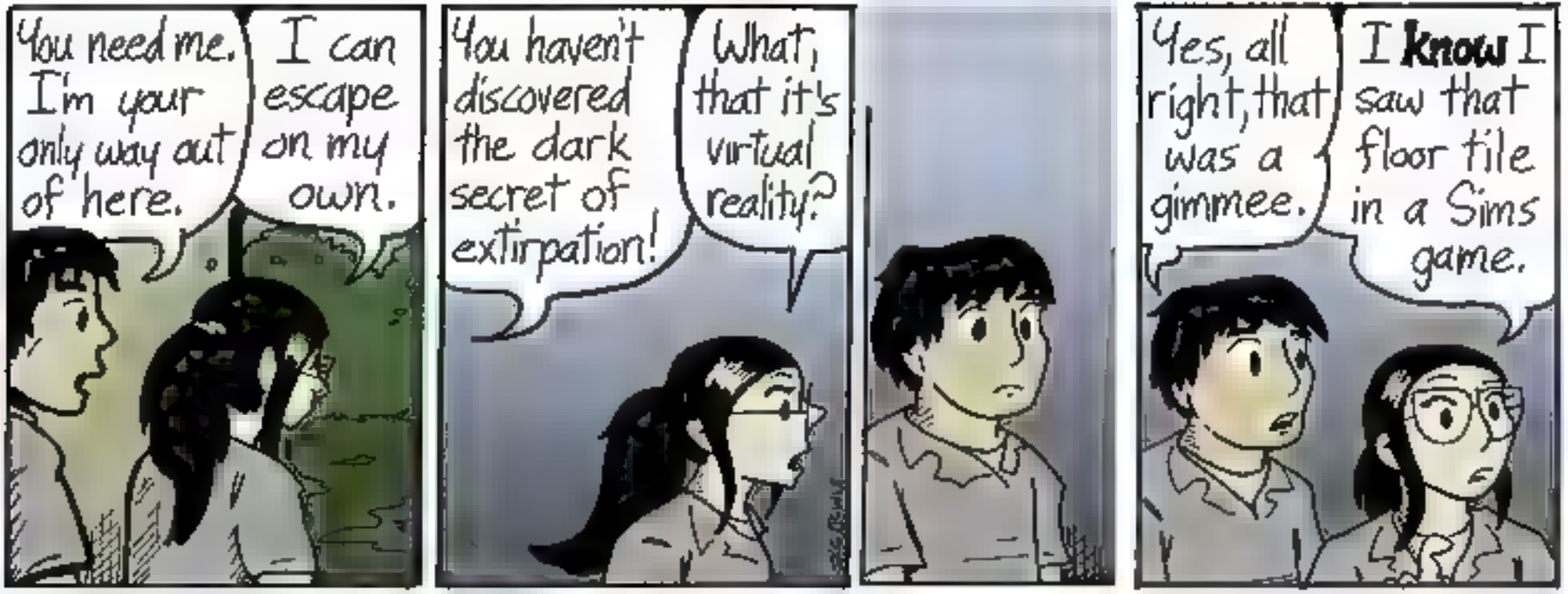
You will come to hate this place with every cell in your body.
Ooh, walnuts.
You will search for any escape, but there is none!
I've never handled the outer walnut fruit before.
You are trapped here! Trapped!
And look! Inside it's like a little brain!
Dammit, be dispirited!
I'll transplant this one to a new shell, because I can!

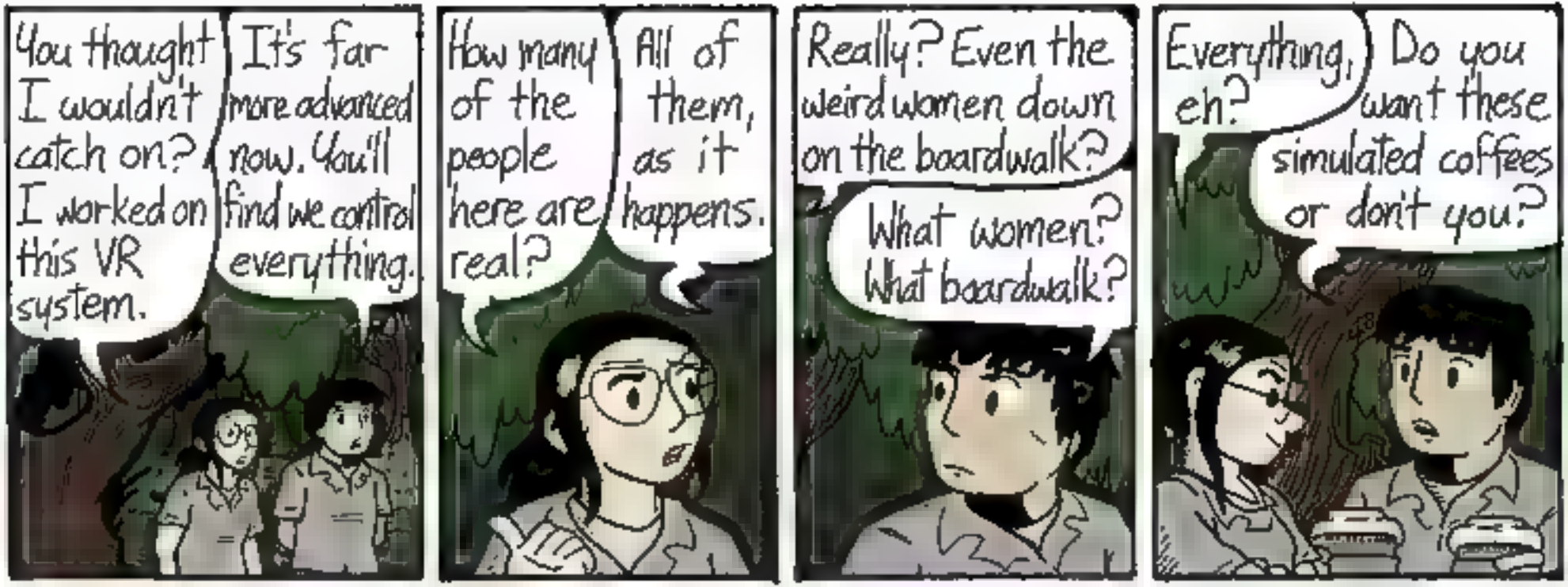

What fascinating bunk vermin!
Ahem... Virginia Lee?
Do I know you?
I know this is no place for a genius of your caliber.
If I analyze that wall slime...
Let me save you from this mind-destroying place!
But I just named my test earwigs!
I may be too late.


Who are you?
Dr. Ao, another prisoner here. I was extirpated for-
Ha ha! No you're not!
Eh?
Either you're Mr. Green or he sent you. Most likely the former.
How could you know that?
Didn't you just call me a genius?
Yes, but not the clever kind.

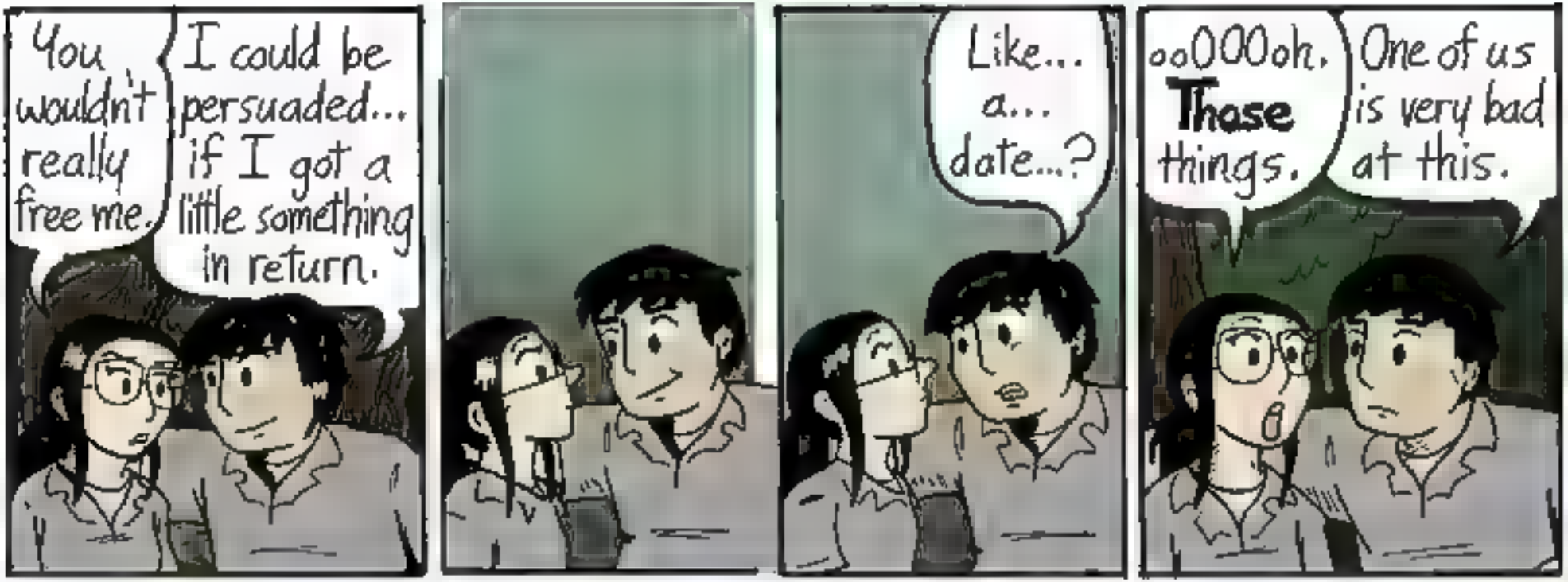
Were you really going to save me?
Well-
No... I've proven my disloyalty. I'm now too great a risk.
More likely you'd "rescue" me to a more agreeable prison. Am I right?
My timetable for you to figure things out was completely off.
Sorry. To borrow a phrase, I got sleet to do.

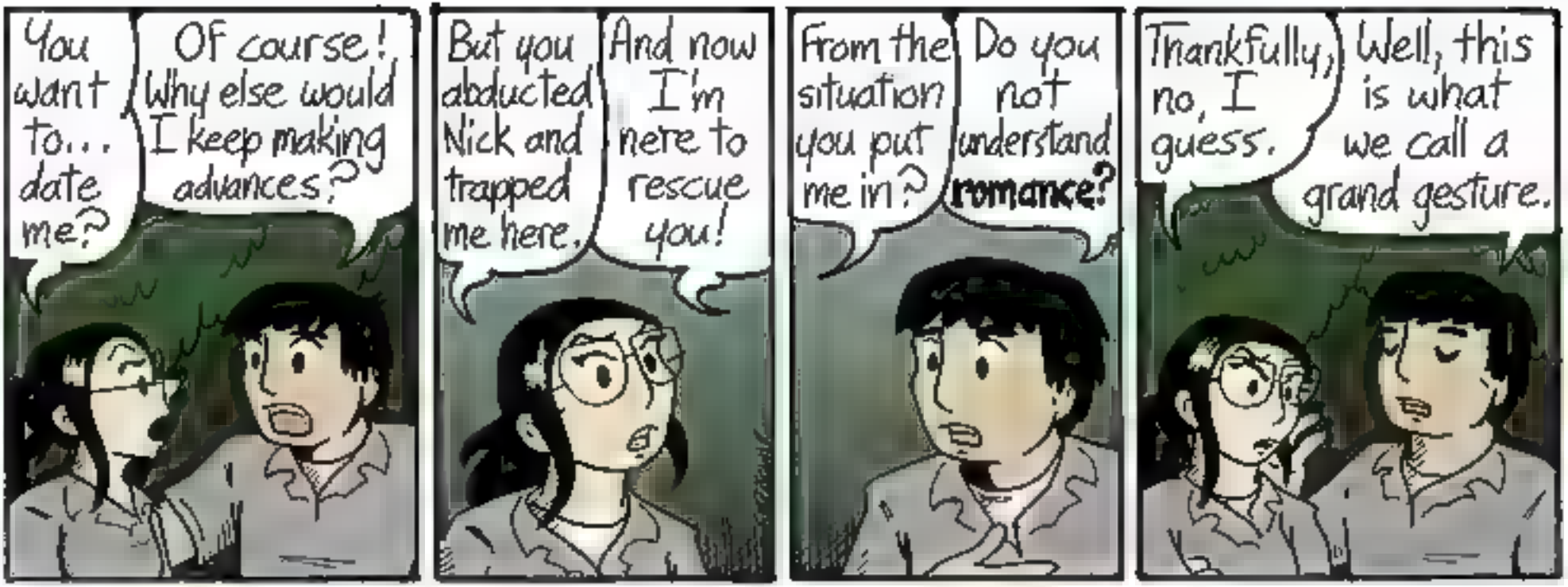

I don't want to talk to you, sir.
I've been helping you for years. Protecting you.
Making a pass at me via the Violet drone?
Yes, that went poorly. Allow me to apologize.
Fine...
Over coffee.
I need coffee so badly I'm tempted to say yes.
See? I'm learning.

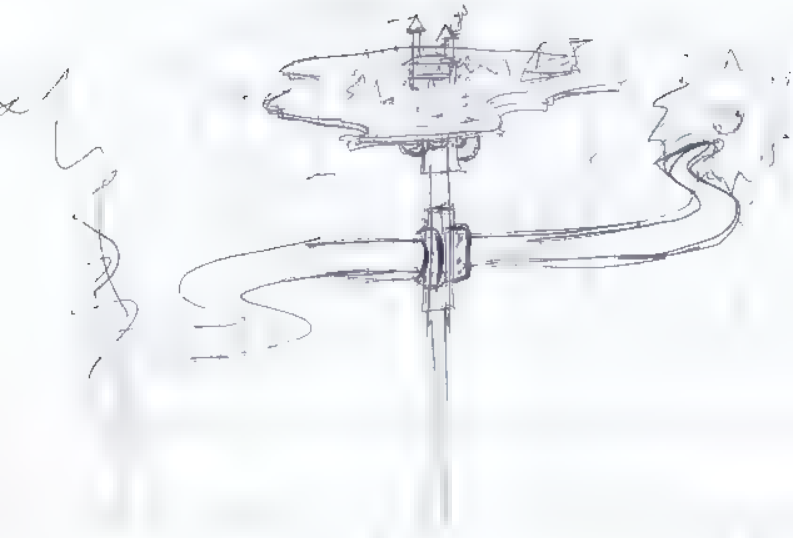

You need me. I'm your only way out of here.
I can escape on my own.
You haven't discovered the dark secret of extirpation!
What, that it's virtual reality?
Yes, all right, that was a gimmee.
I know I saw that floor tile in a Sims game.

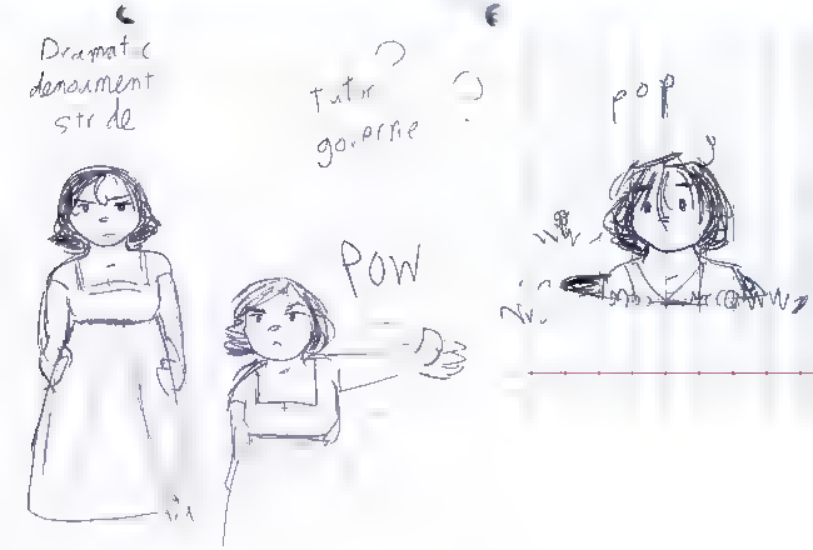

You thought I wouldn't catch on? I worked on this VR system.
It's far more advanced now. You'll find we control everything.
How many of the people here are real?
All of them, as it happens.
Really? Even the weird women down on the boardwalk?
What women? What boardwalk?
Everything, eh?
Do you want these simulated coffees or don't you?

I can't trust anything in here.
Trust that you're a special case. You're important to me.
As long as I'm in VR, you can manipulate me in any way.
For all I know, you've already scooped my brain out of my skull...
Actually, are you thinking of doing that? Because I've wondered what that's like...
A very special case indeed.


You wouldn't really free me.
I could be persuaded... if I got a little something in return.
Like... a... date...?
ooOOOoh. Those things.
One of us is very bad at this.

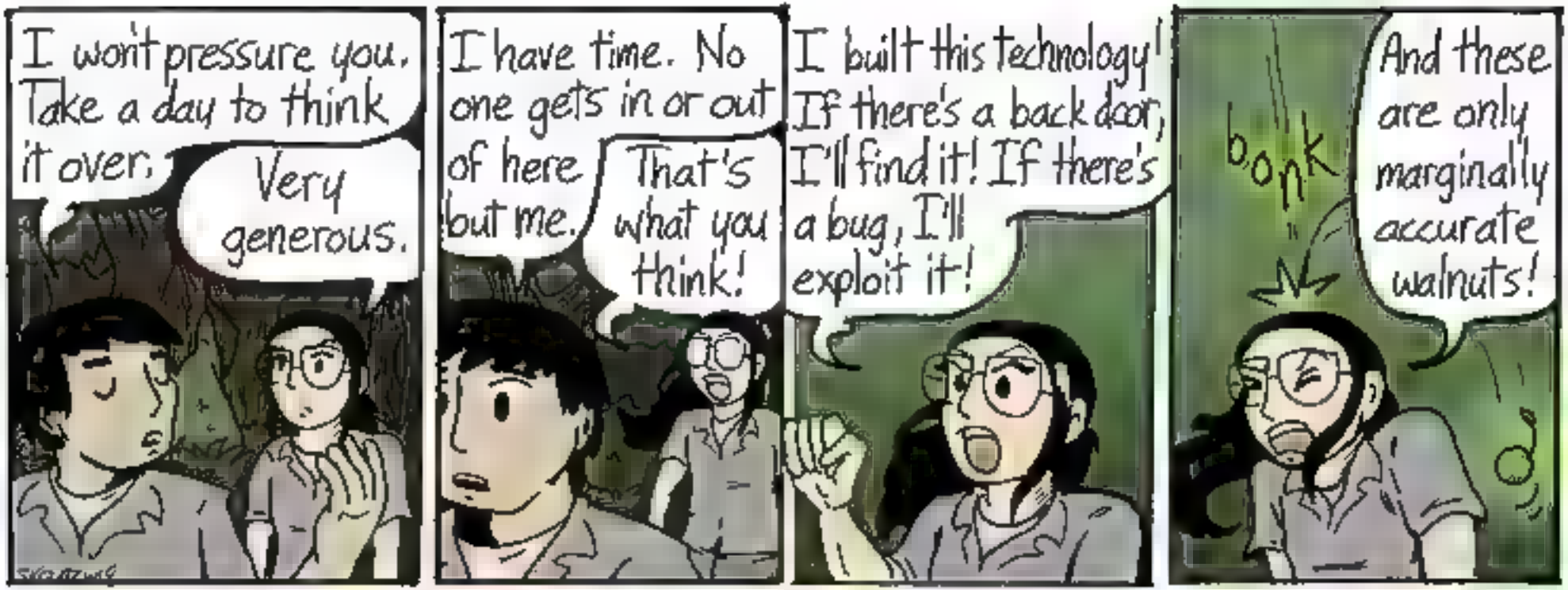

You want to... date me?
Of course! Why else would I keep making advances?
But you abducted Nick and trapped me here.
And now I'm here to rescue you!
From the situation you put me in?
Do you not understand romance?
Thankfully, no, I guess.
Well, this is what we call a grand gesture.




Dramatic
dénouement
stride
Tutu
gourme
POW
pop

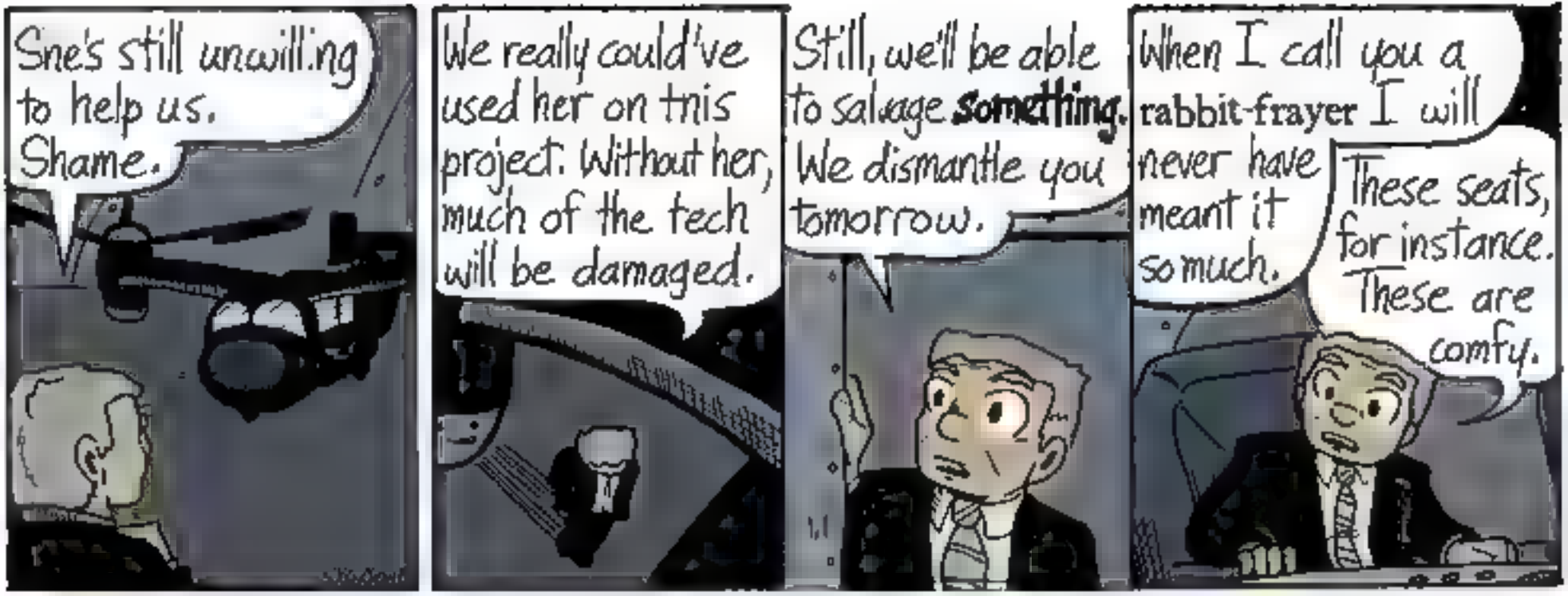
Why would you want a date with someone who was forced into it?
I'm not forcing. I'm providing incentive.
You're a very bad man.
Oh, no, I'm really a very good man.
But in reality, good men must make hard choices.
In reality, I bet you're not this hot.
I'll leave that for the ladies to decide.

If I play along, will you free Nick?
I can free you.
I'm fine here. I need your word Nick will live.
Virginia, he's barely living now.
You killed his body years ago. Isn't it time to stop trying to assauge your guilt?
If this is a preview of our date, I'm not feeling it.
I've got a Chez Panisse sim cued up. All class.


I won't pressure you. Take a day to think it over.
Very generous.
I have time. No one gets in or out of here but me.
That's what you think!
I built this technology! If there's a back door, I'll find it! If there's a bug, I'll exploit it!
bonk
And these are only marginally accurate walnuts!

Mr. Green wants me back and wants me loyal. He's willing to kill Nick.
Well, intimidation won't work on me. I don't scare so easily.
RAR WALNUT MONSTER
YAUGH!
Jump scares don't count!
It's like a stick museum here!

What are you doing out here?
The beach is right there, silly.
Listen. Last time I was here, Melanie mentioned a mayor.
Yeah, she talks a lot.
Is it possible to speak to this person?
Oh, that's easy. Just visit City Hall.
This is an exciting new definition of "easy."
We'll need rope, goat food, and ghost repellant.

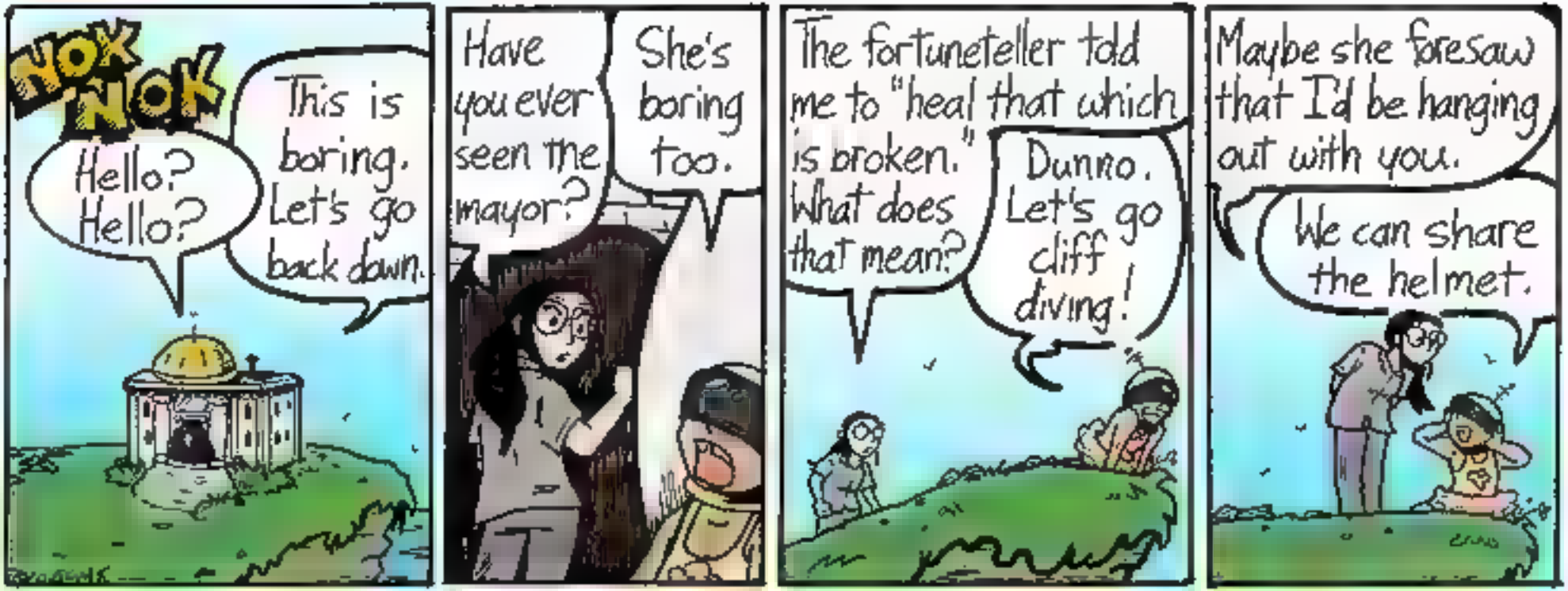

She's still unwilling to help us. Shame.
We really could've used her on this project. Without her, much of the tech will be damaged.
Still, we'll be able to salvage something. We dismantle you tomorrow.
When I call you a rabbit-frayer I will never have meant it so much.
These seats, for instance. These are comfy.

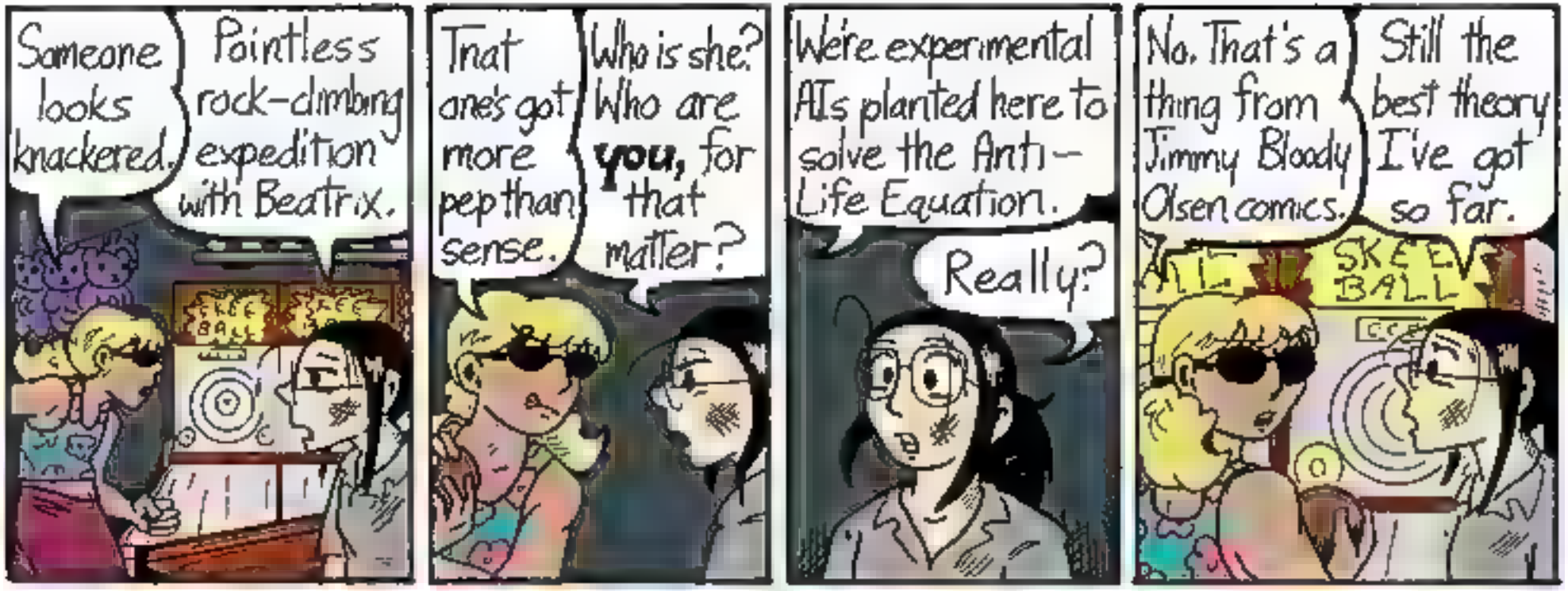
MILEHICON
DENVER
OCTOBER 19-21

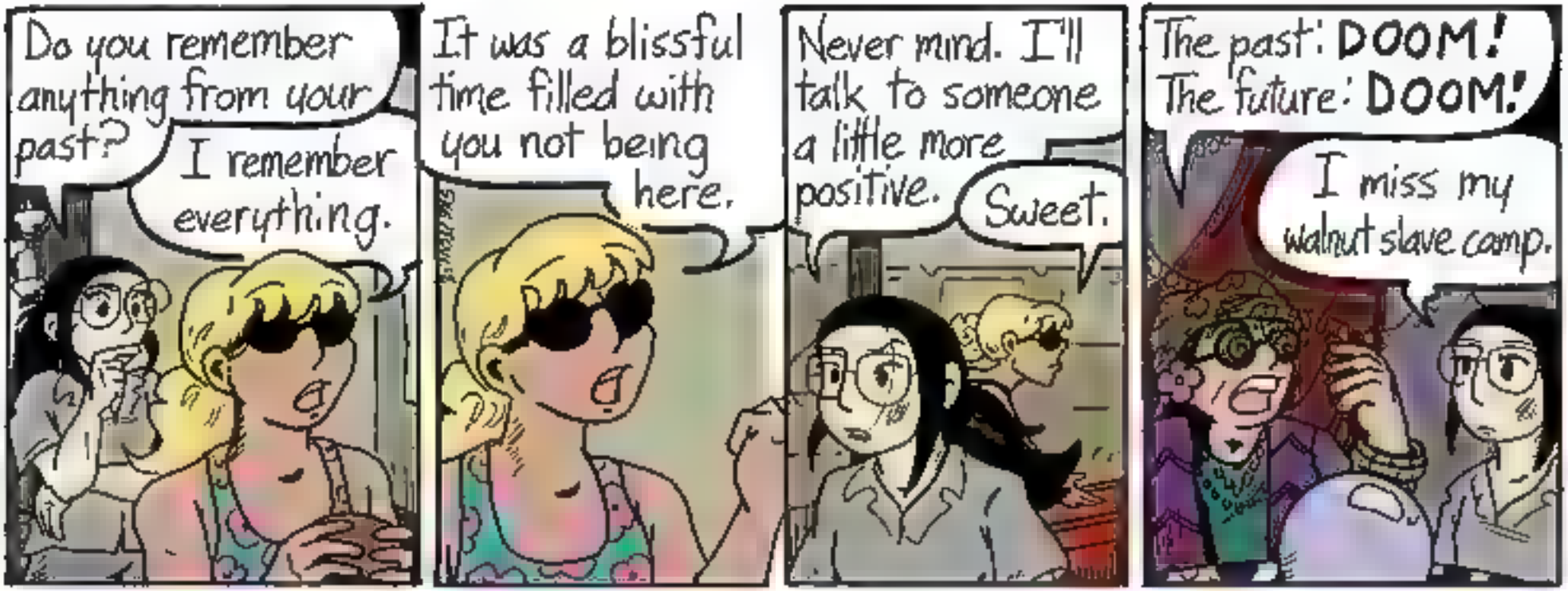
ZOMBIE GNOME RELEASE PARTY
SAN FRANCISCO
OCTOBER 27

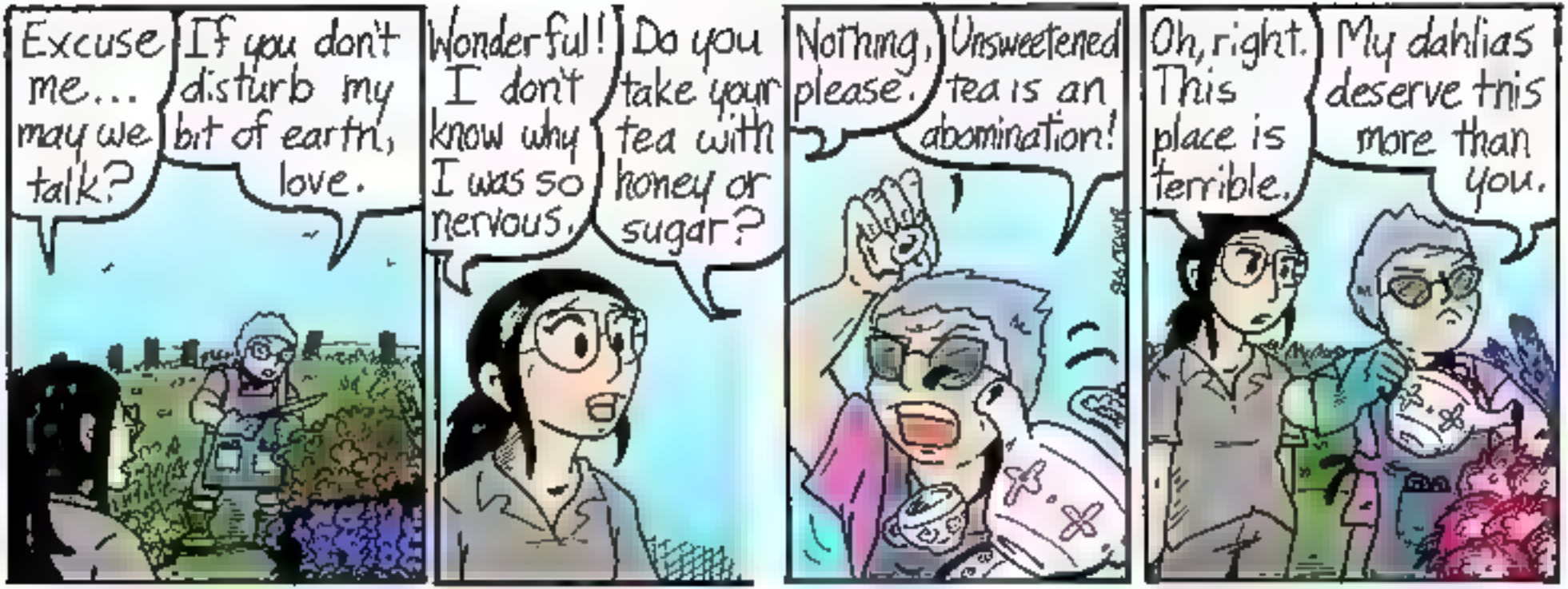
BOOK + ART SALE
ALL MONTH LONG

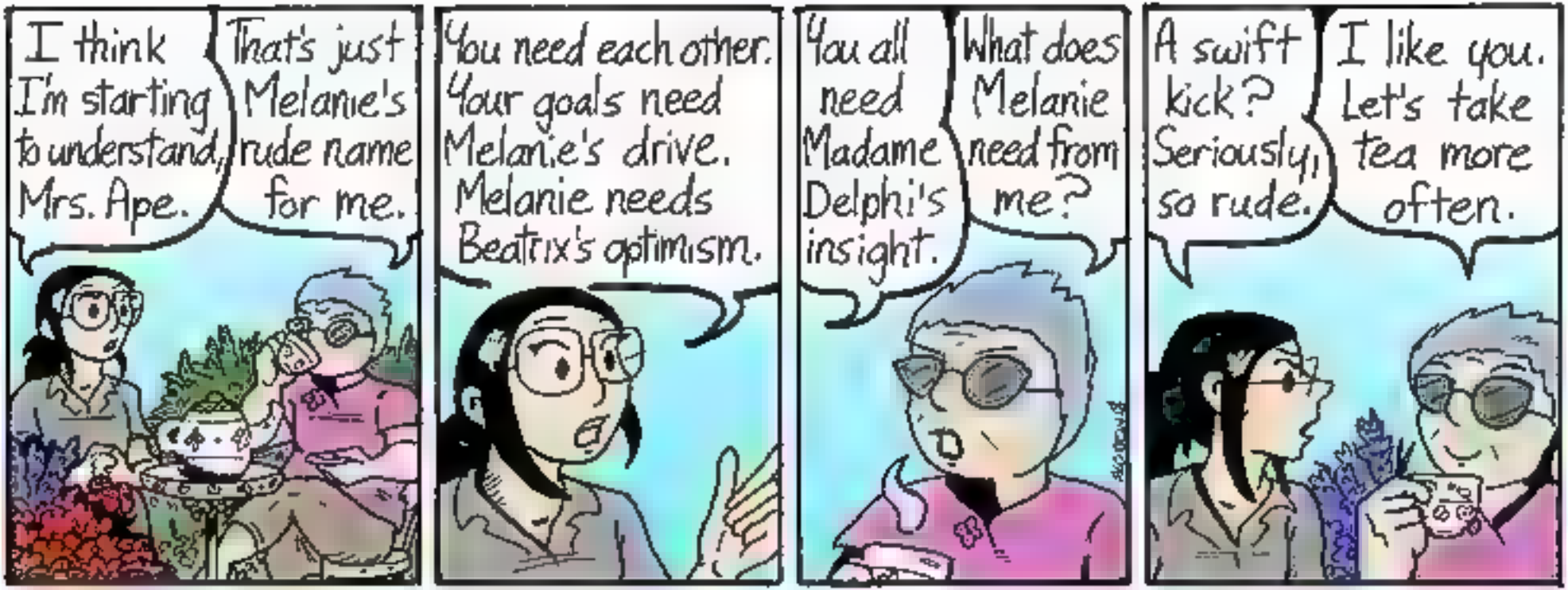
You're in love with her, aren't you?
What's it to you?
You know she could never have feelings for something like you.
She likes me. People didn't use to like me
We're friends, and that beats anything a pretzel like you's ever gonna have.
Ever convince yourself of that, do you?
On my good days, pretzel. Admittedly this ain't one of 'em.

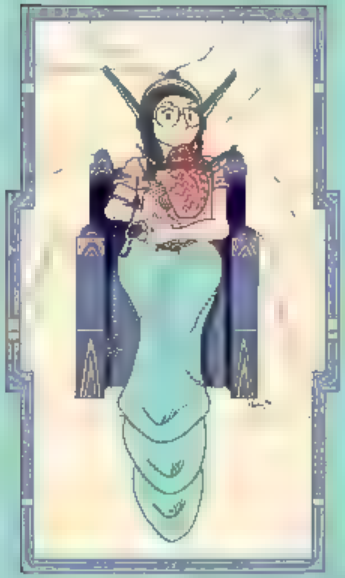

NOK NOK
Hello? Hello?
This is boring. Let's go back down.
Have you ever seen the mayor?
She's boring too.
The fortuneteller told me to "heal that which is broken." What does that mean?
Dunno. Let's go cliff diving!
Maybe she foresaw that I'd be hanging out with you.
We can share the helmet.

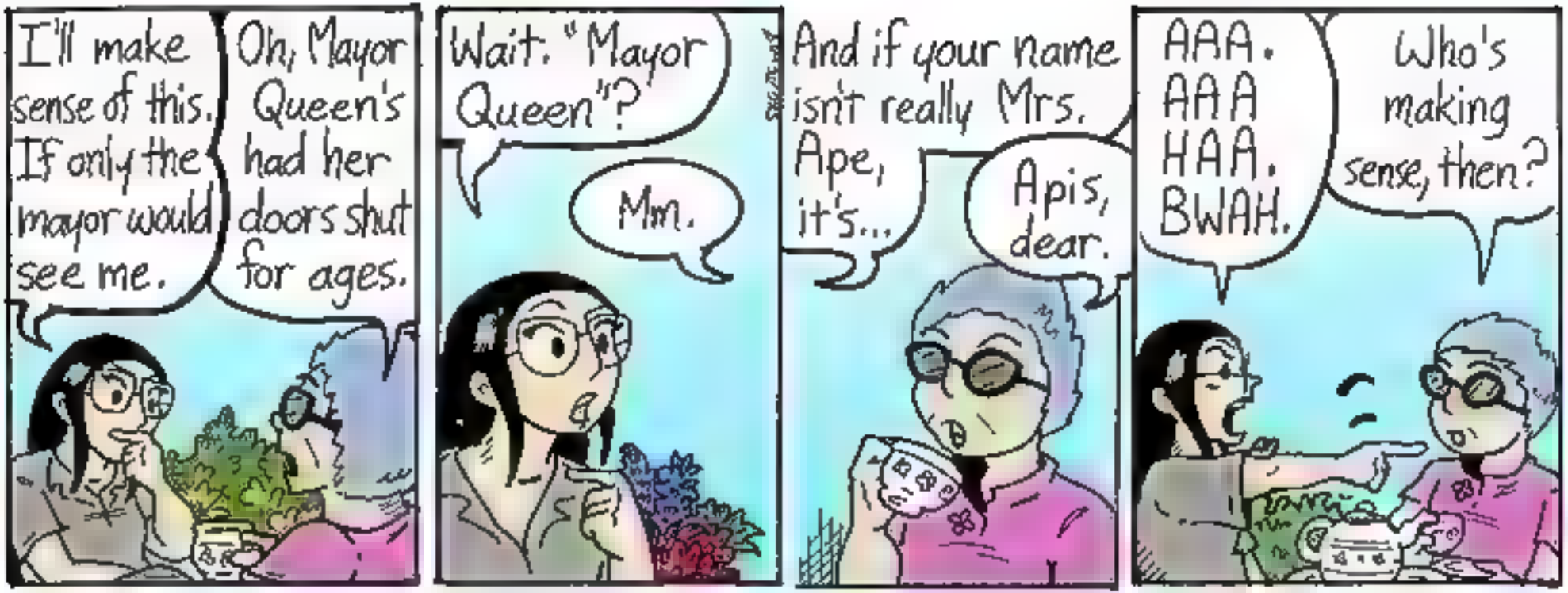

Someone looks knackered.
Pointless rock-climbing expedition with Beatrix.
That one's got more pep than sense.
Who is she? Who are you, for that matter?
We're experimental AIs planted here to solve the Anti-Life Equation.
Really?
No. That's a thing from Jimmy Bloody Olsen comics.
Still the best theory I've got so far.
SKEE BALL


Do you remember anything from your past?
I remember everything.
It was a blissful time filled with you not being here.
Never mind. I'll talk to someone a little more positive.
Sweet.
The past: DOOM!
The future: DOOM!
I miss my walnut slave camp.

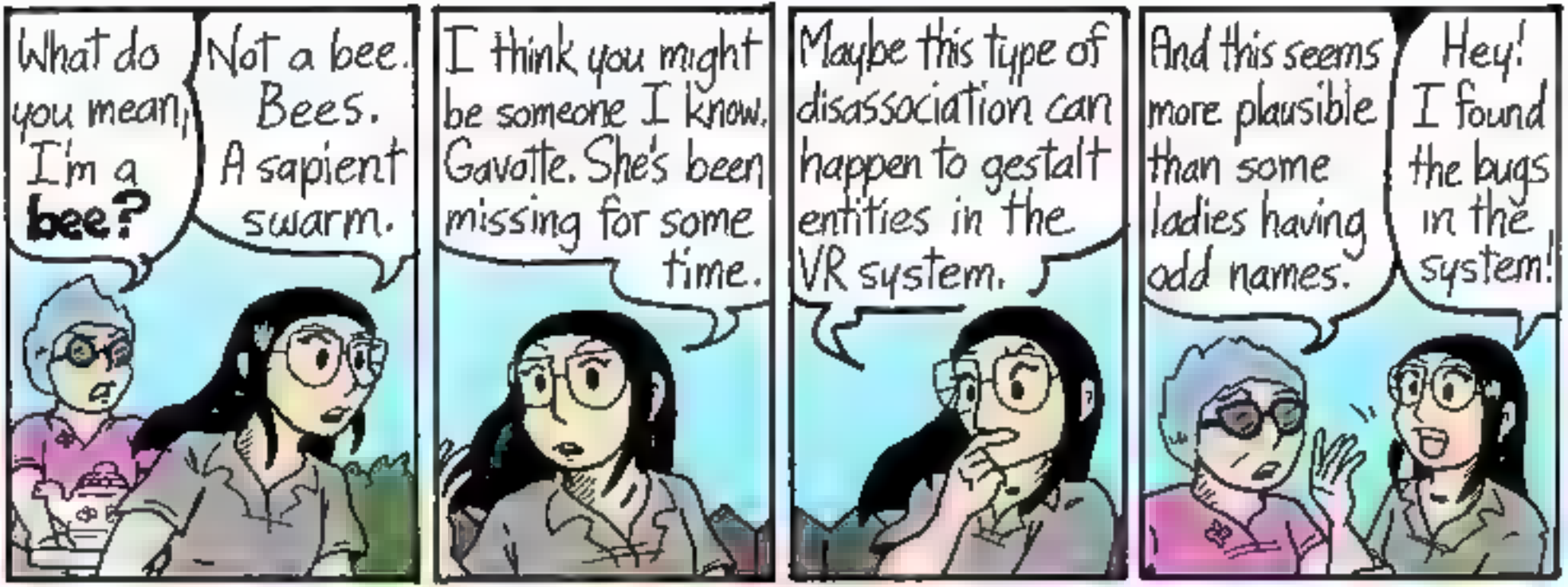

Excuse me... may we talk?
If you don't disturb my bit of earth, love.
Wonderful! I don't know why I was so nervous.
Do you take your tea with honey or sugar?
Nothing, please.
Unsweetened tea is an abomination!
Oh, right. This place is terrible.
My dahlias deserve this more than you.


I think I'm starting to understand, Mrs. Ape.
That's just Melanie's rude name for me.
You need each other. Your goals need Melanie's drive. Melanie needs Beatrix's optimism.
You all need Madame Delphi's insight.
What does Melanie need from me?
A swift kick? Seriously, so rude.
I like you. Let's take tea more often.




I'll make sense of this. If only the mayor would see me.
Oh, Mayor Queen's had her doors shut for ages.
Wait. "Mayor Queen"?
Mm.
And if your name isn't really Mrs. Ape, it's...
Apis, dear.
AAA. AAA HAA. BWAH.
Who's making sense, then?

Youre bees! Not just you! All of you!
Pardon?
Youre Apis! The mayor is a "Queen"! Melanie is A. mellifera, the Western honeybee, and bees were a symbol of Delphi!
The only one whose name doesn't make sense is little Bea!
Yes, all right, I just heard myself.
I need more honey.

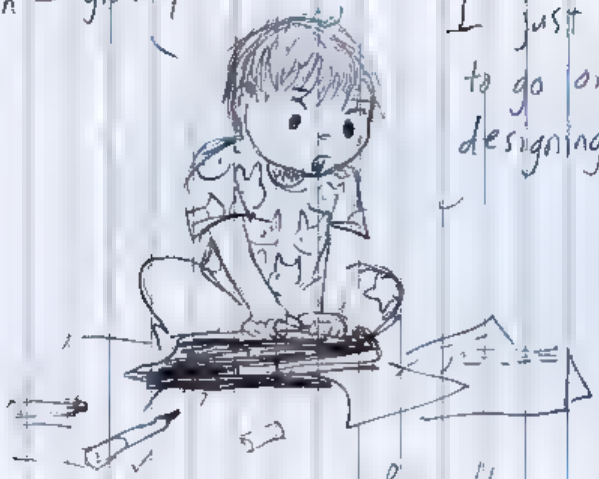

What do you mean, I'm a bee?
Not a bee. Bees. A sapient swarm.
I think you might be someone I know. Gavotte. She's been missing for some time.
Maybe this type of disassociation can happen to gestalt entities in the VR system.
And this seems more plausible than some ladies having odd names.
Hey! I found the bugs in the system!

Melanie! Bea! This is important!
As important as rolling a triple 60?
No, listen! You two are the same person!
pik pik
Which of us is that meant to insult?
I picked an extra green boogey!

Enter! Madame Delphi foresees all!
You're a swarm of bees!
Madame Delphi did not foresee you saying that.
Come with me. The others won't listen.
I cannot leave my parlor! It would mean DOOM!
And if you stay here?
Admittedly also DOOM!
Progress. This is broadly progress.

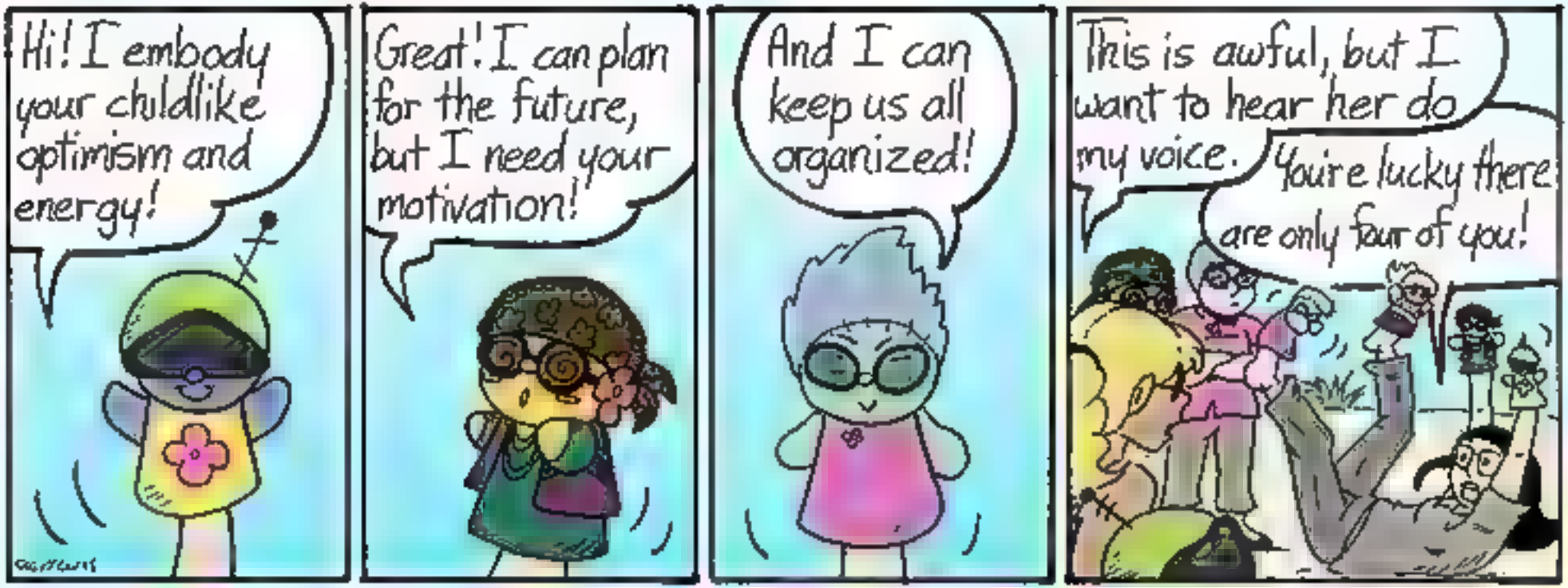
Not even you believe me, Bea?
Nah! But I can **pretend** to be a bee! Buzz buzz!
I'm no good with people. Or bees. I need a psychologist.
You can pretend to be a psychologist.
Why, hello, nonhuman clients! I am blond, flighty, and flawlessly waxed!
Wait, this is working. Find me some puppets.
Did you just get more stylish?

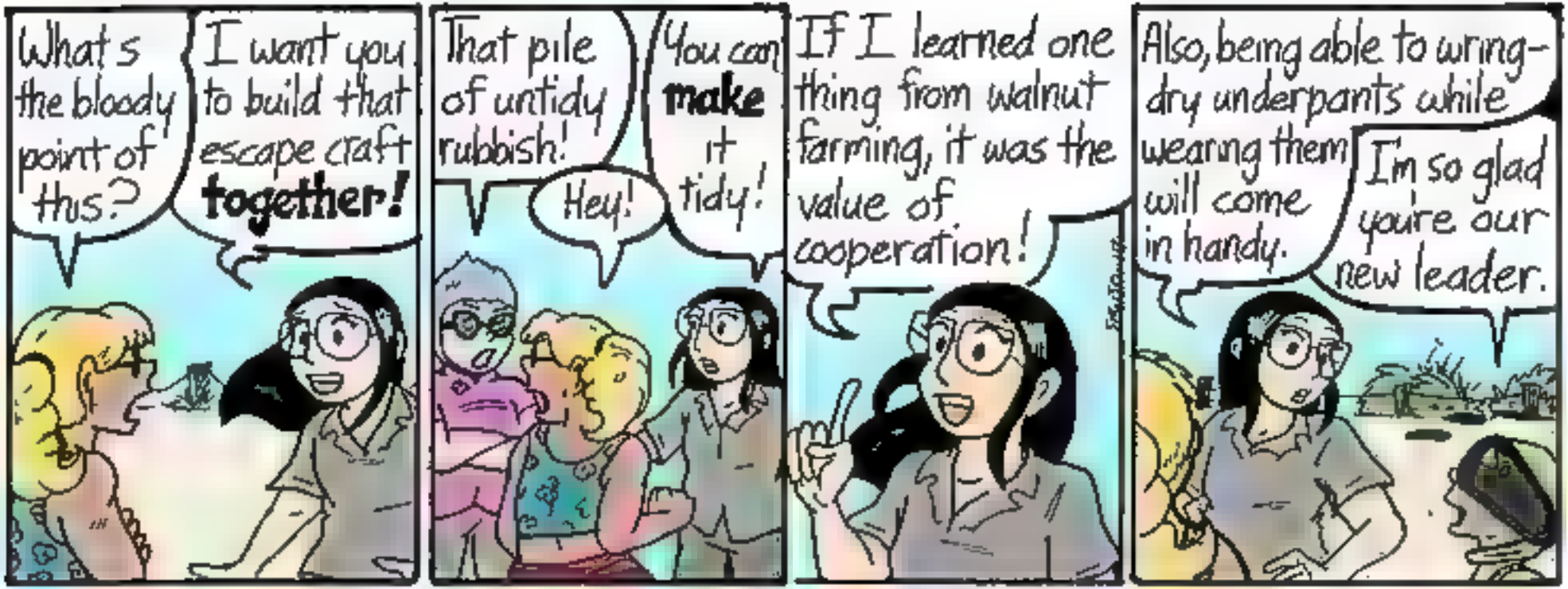
I don't want to go to work when I grow up.



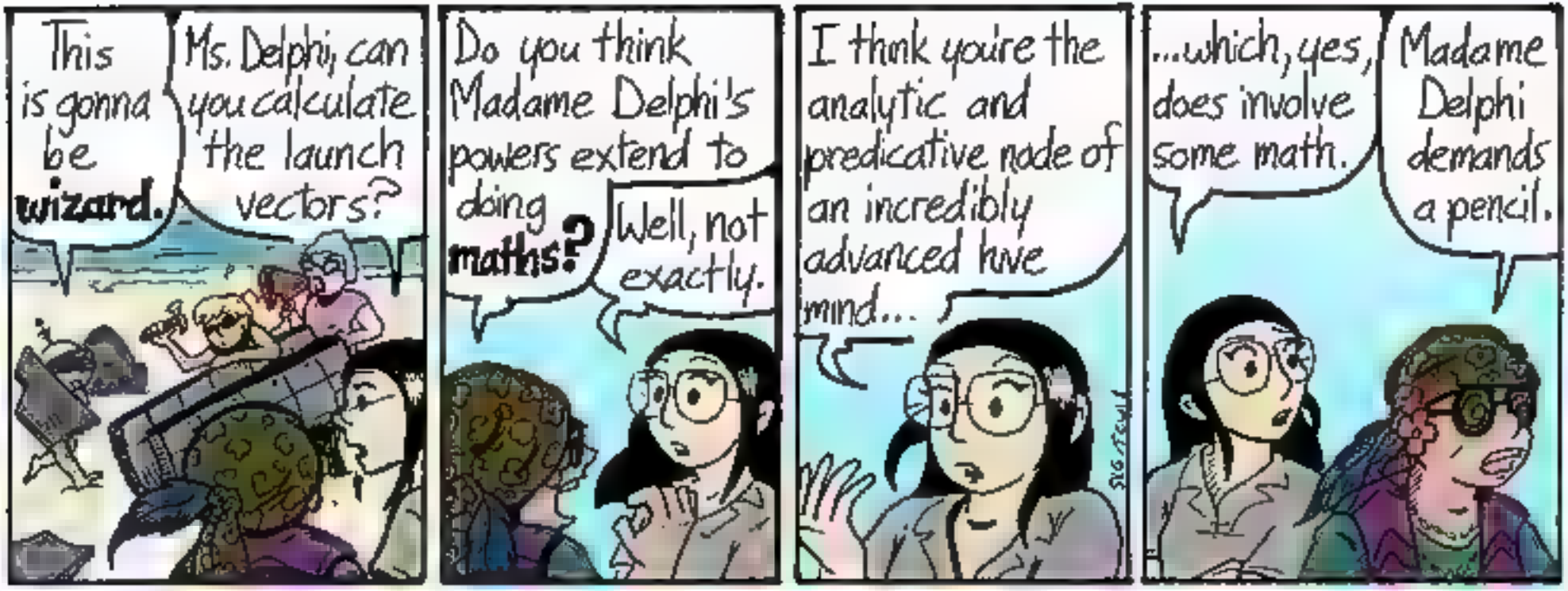
I just want to go on designing things.

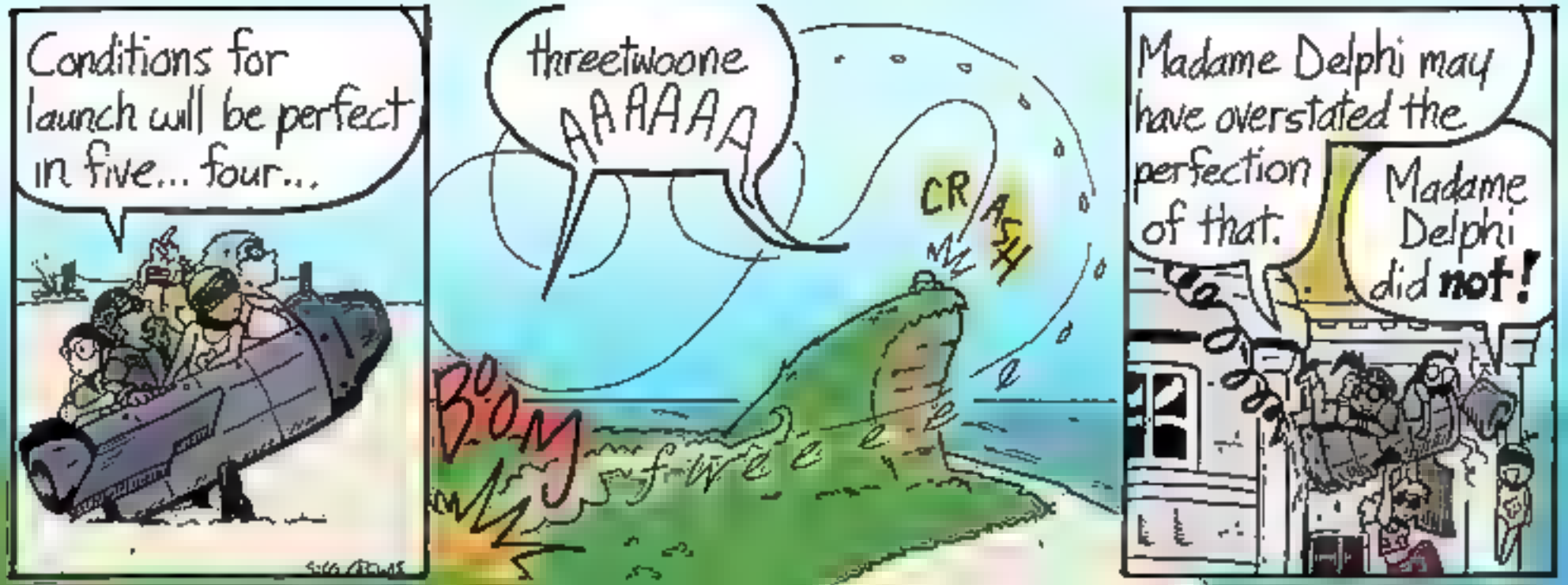
Ron n, 4

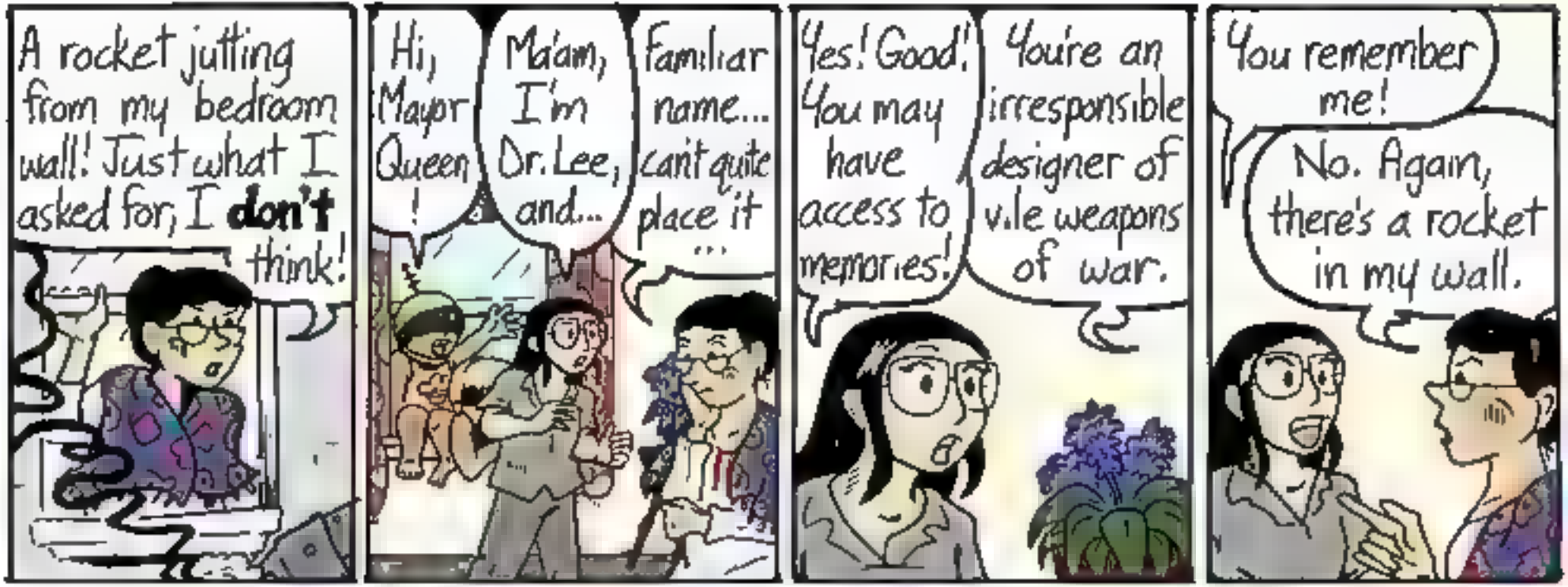

Hi! I embody your childlike optimism and energy!
Great! I can plan for the future, but I need your motivation!
And I can keep us all organized!
This is awful, but I want to hear her do my voice.
You're lucky there are only four of you!


What's the bloody point of this?
I want you to build that escape craft together!
That pile of untidy rubbish!
Hey!
You can make it tidy!
If I learned one thing from walnut farming, it was the value of cooperation!
Also, being able to wring-dry underpants while wearing them will come in handy.
I'm so glad you're our new leader.

No escape craft can free us! The bus is the only way out!
We're not using this to escape.
We're going to rocket to the top of City Hall!
If the "mayor" won't come out, I'll fly this entire circus into her bedroom!
Lady, you had me at "rocket" and "circus."
I'll put another kettle on.

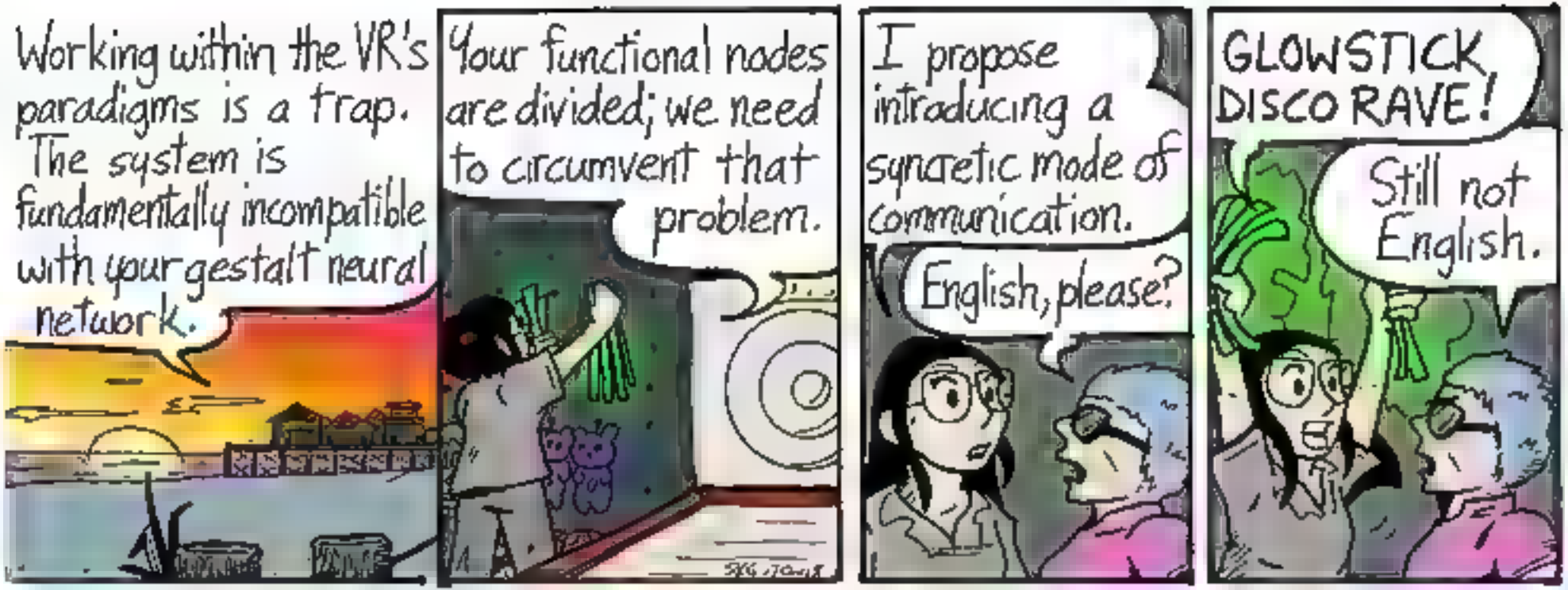

This is gonna be wizard.
Ms. Delphi, can you calculate the launch vectors?
Do you think Madame Delphi's powers extend to doing maths?
Well, not exactly.
I think you're the analytic and predicative node of an incredibly advanced hive mind...
...which, yes, does involve some math.
Madame Delphi demands a pencil.

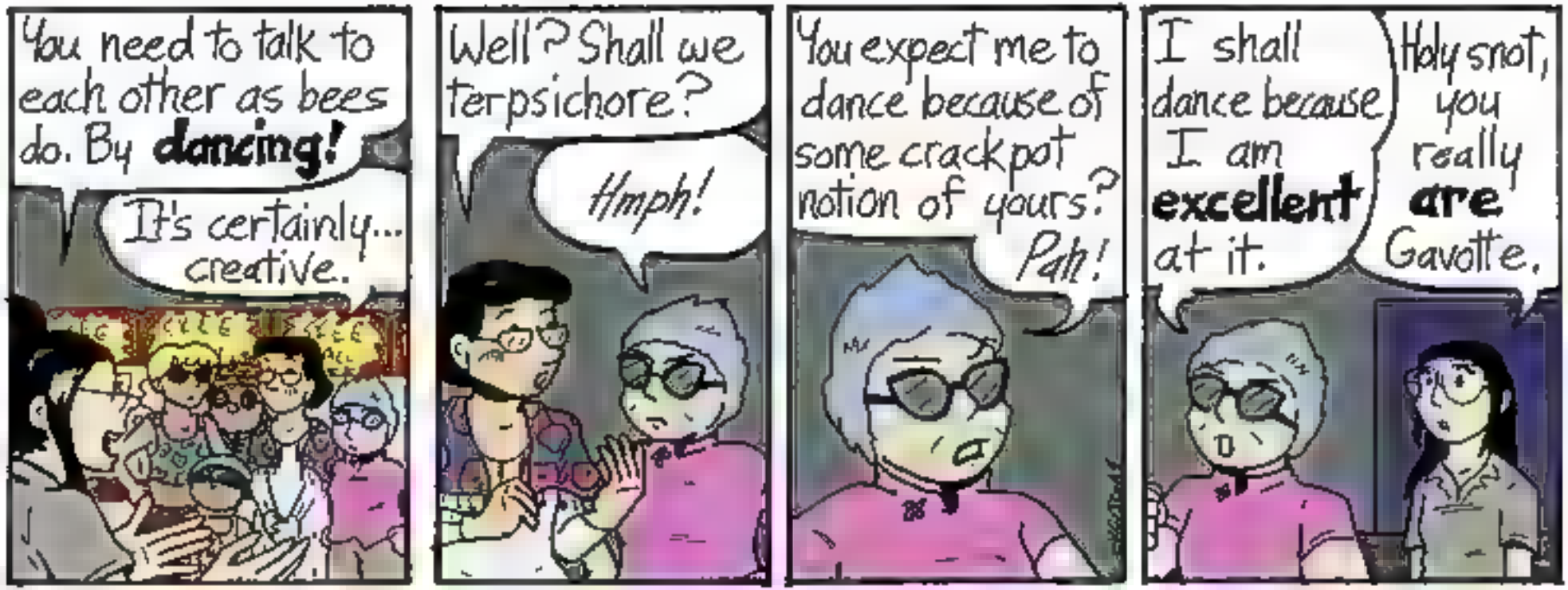

Conditions for launch will be perfect in five... four...
threetwoone
AAAAAA
CRASH
BOOM
fwee
Madame Delphi may have overstated the perfection of that.
Madame Delphi did **not**!

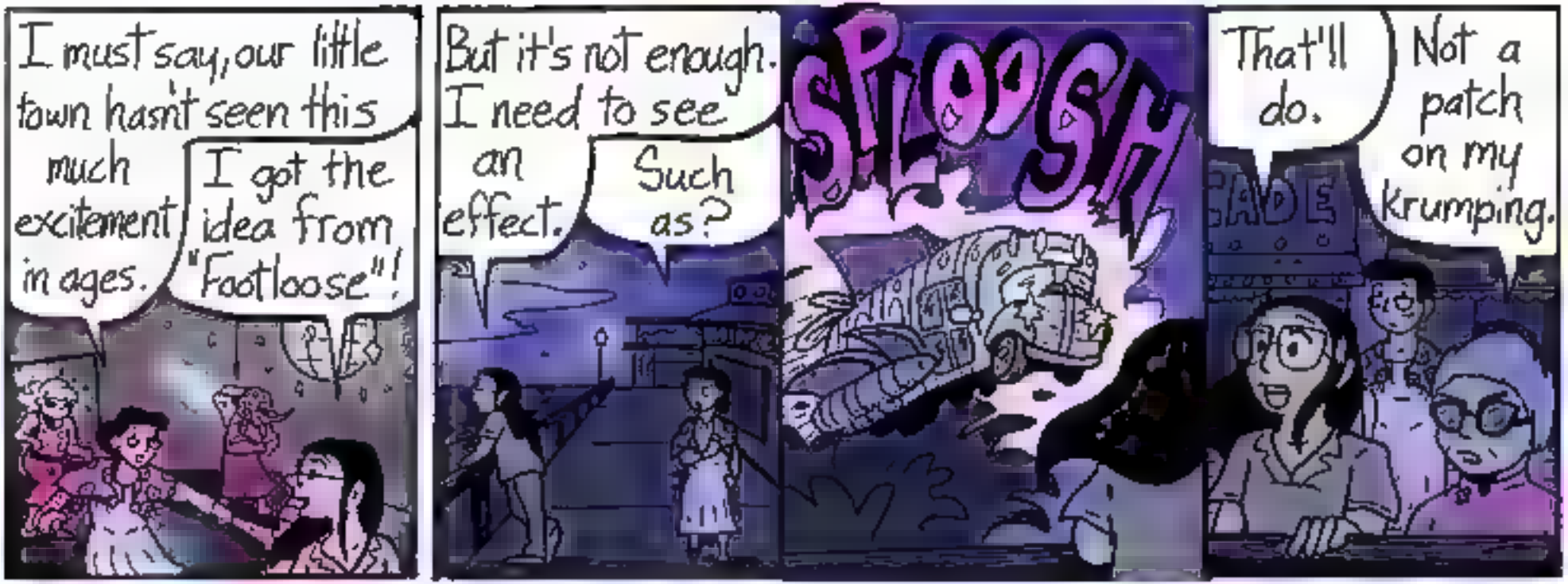

A rocket jutting from my bedroom wall! Just what I asked for; I **don't** think!
Hi, Mayor Queen!
Ma'am, I'm Dr. Lee, and...
Familiar name... can't quite place it...
Yes! Good! You may have access to memories!
You're an irresponsible designer of vile weapons of war.
You remember me!
No. Again, there's a rocket in my wall.

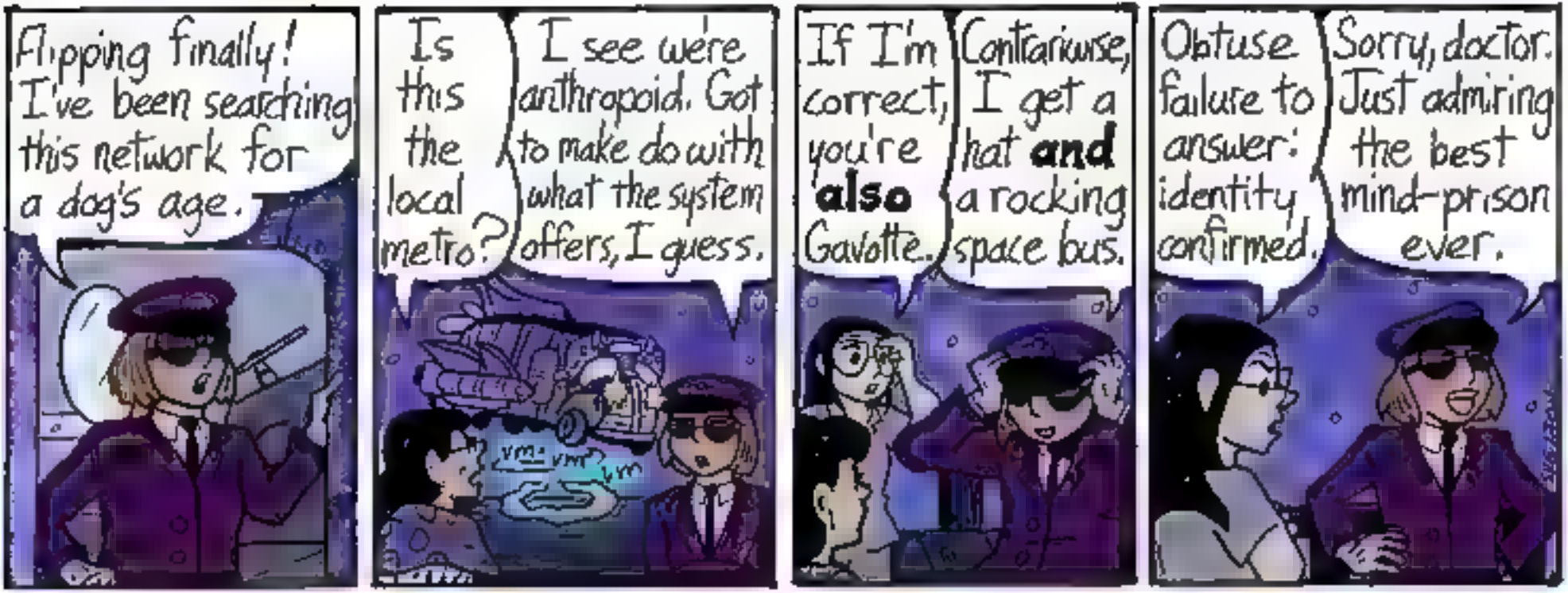
Mayor. Queen. Can you **please** help me get out of here?
Certainly not!
Of course not.
I'm quite done with running this town. No one appreciates a busybody.
So much work, and what do I have to show for it?
A posh house with a wicked ocean view?
Besides that.

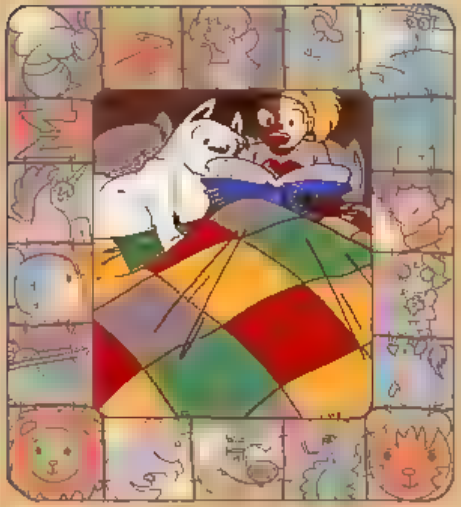
I couldn't call the bus even if I wanted to.
Why not? Any data helps.
I... I've lost the number.
Ha! That's where you get without organization!
I have an idea. Promise you won't think I'm crazy.
That ship's sailed.
Far over the horizon.
First, does anyone have a disco ball?

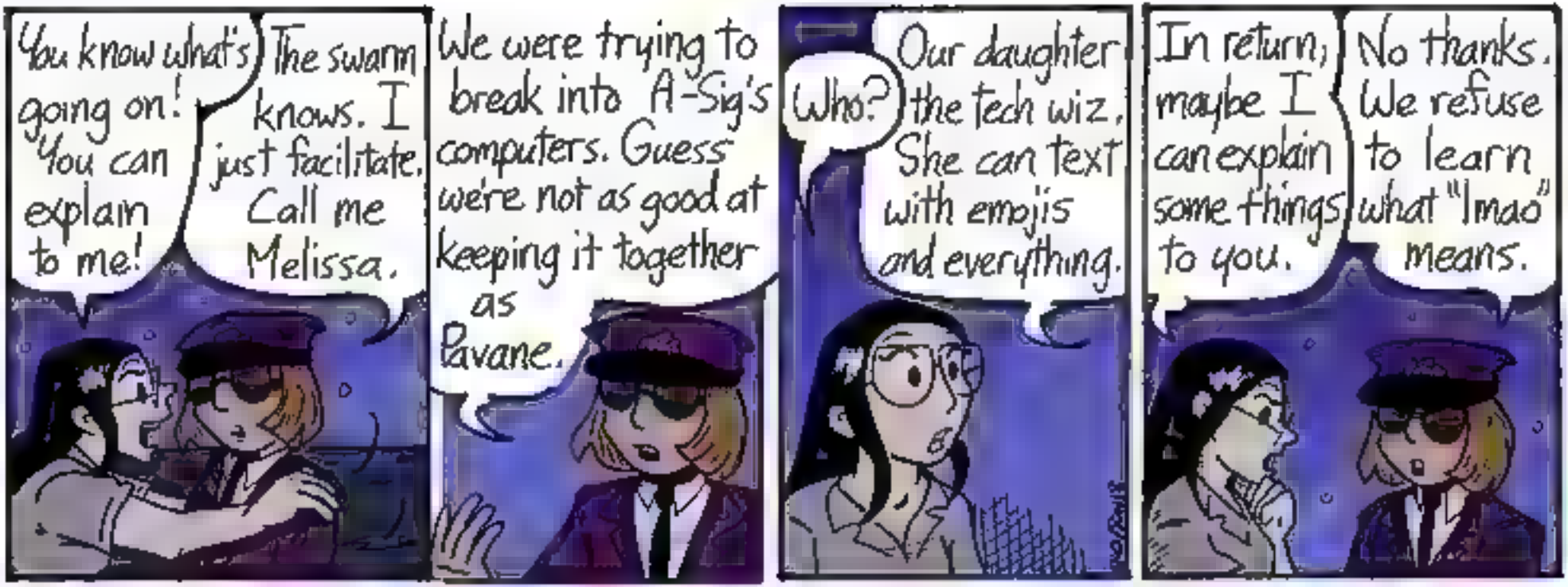

Working within the VR's paradigms is a trap. The system is fundamentally incompatible with your gestalt neural network.
Your functional nodes are divided; we need to circumvent that problem.
I propose introducing a syncretic mode of communication.
English, please?
GLOWSTICK, DISCO RAVE!
Still not English.

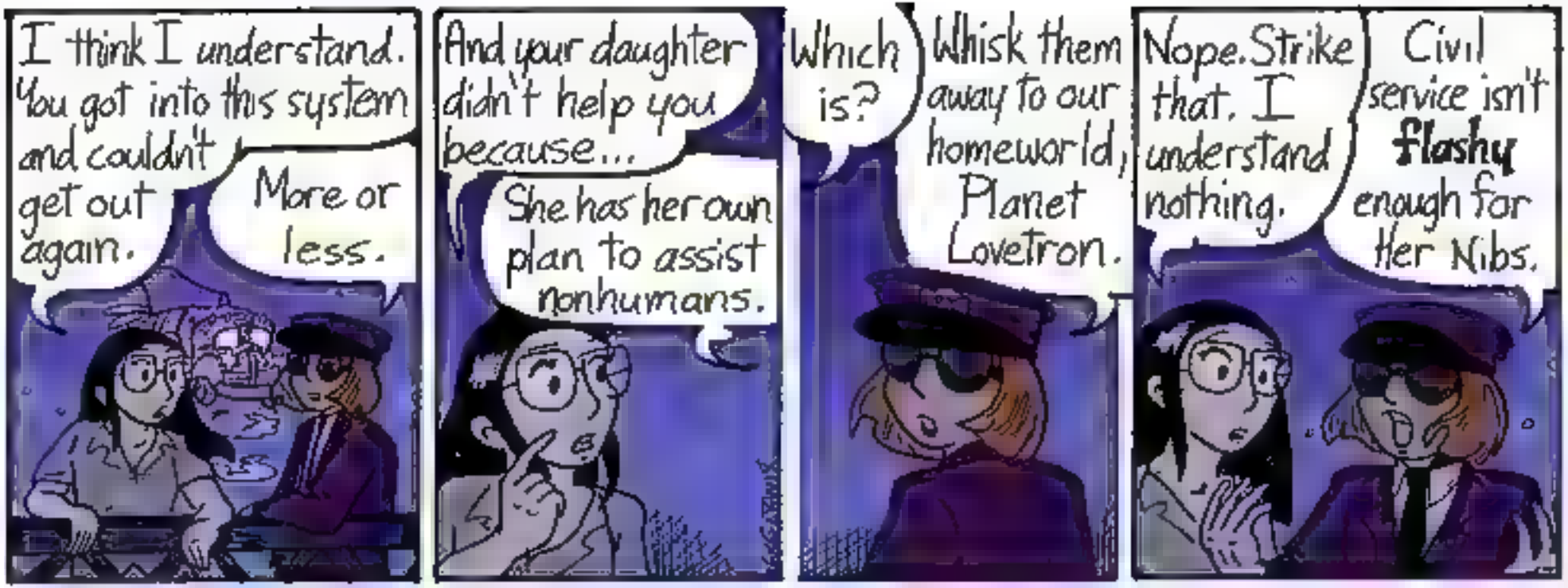

You need to talk to each other as bees do. By **dancing!**
It's certainly... creative.
Well? Shall we terpsichore?
Hmph!
You expect me to dance because of some crackpot notion of yours?
Pah!
I shall dance because I am **excellent** at it.
Holy snot, you really **are** Gavotte.

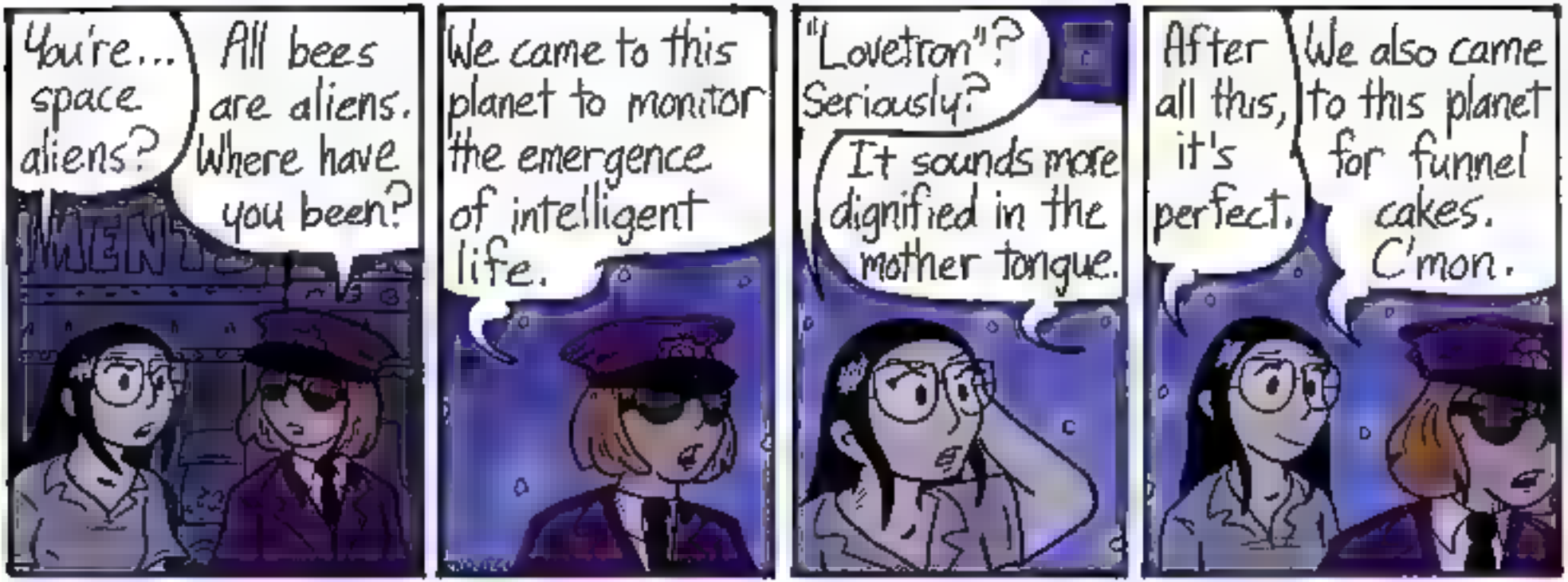

I must say, our little town hasn't seen this much excitement in ages.
I got the idea from "Footloose"!
But it's not enough. I need to see an effect.
Such as?
SPLOOSH
That'll do.
Not a patch on my krumping.


Flipping finally! I've been searching this network for a dog's age.
Is this the local metro?
I see we're anthropoid. Got to make do with what the system offers, I guess.
If I'm correct, you're **also** Gavotte.
Contrariwise, I get a hat **and** a rocking space bus.
Obtuse failure to answer: identity confirmed.
Sorry, doctor. Just admiring the best mind-prison ever.



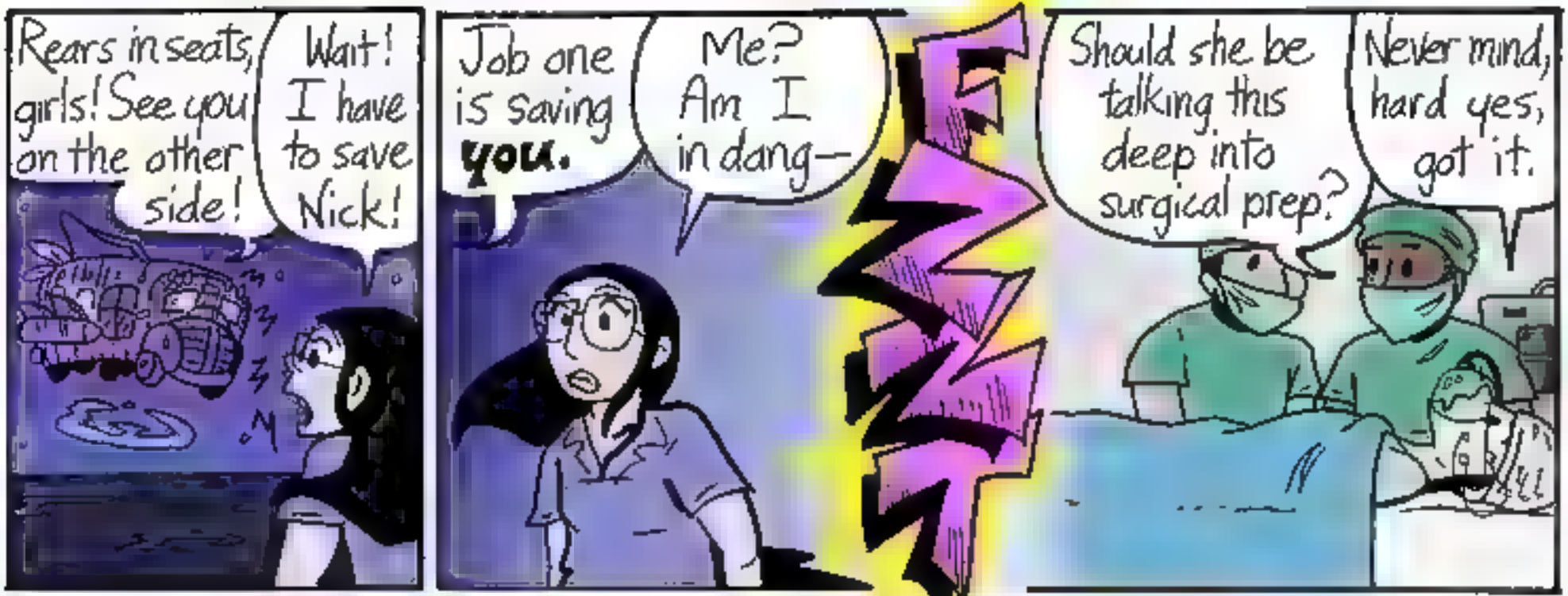

You know what's going on! You can explain to me!
The swarm knows. I just facilitate. Call me Melissa.
We were trying to break into A-Sig's computers. Guess we're not as good at keeping it together as Pavane.
Who?
Our daughter the tech wiz. She can text with emojis and everything.
In return, maybe I can explain some things to you.
No thanks. We refuse to learn what "lmao" means.

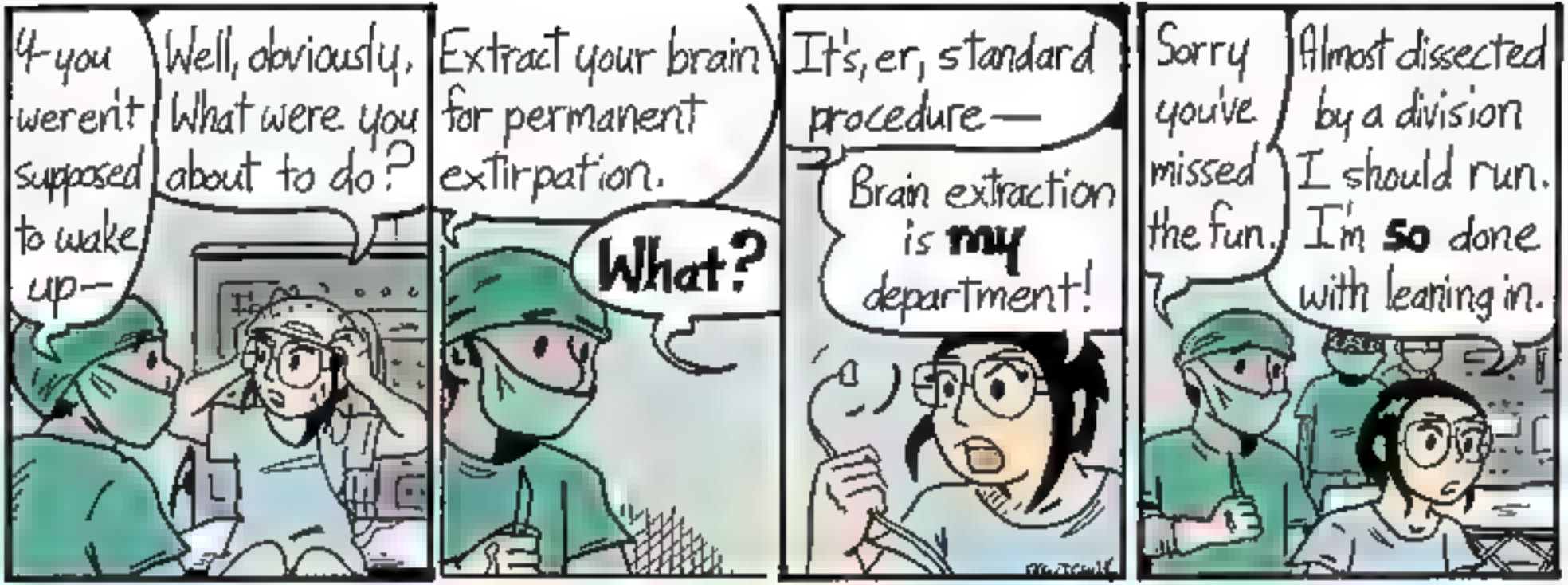

I think I understand. You got into this system and couldn't get out again.
More or less.
And your daughter didn't help you because...
She has her own plan to assist nonhumans.
Which is?
Whisk them away to our homeworld, Planet Lovetron.
Nope. Strike that. I understand nothing.
Civil service isn't flashy enough for Her Nibs.

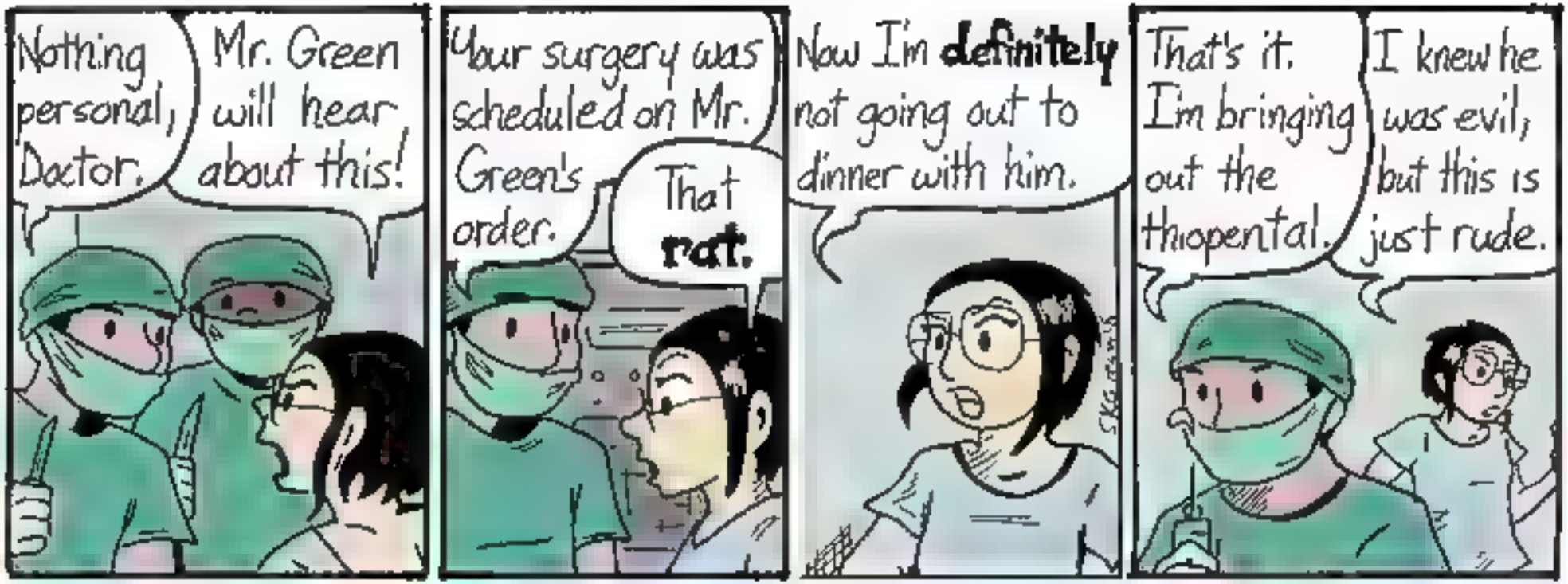

You're... space aliens?
All bees are aliens. Where have you been?
MEN
We came to this planet to monitor the emergence of intelligent life.
"Lovetron"? Seriously?
It sounds more dignified in the mother tongue.
After all this, it's perfect.
We also came to this planet for funnel cakes. C'mon.

It's been a fun few epochs, but we're pulling out.
You're leaving Earth?
"Colony collapse" is just a pretext for withdrawal. One of many reasons time is of the essence.
That's awful.
Don't mourn. It's a reunion with the eternal global consciousness.
No, I mean, where will we get honey?
What is with you people and stealing our honey?

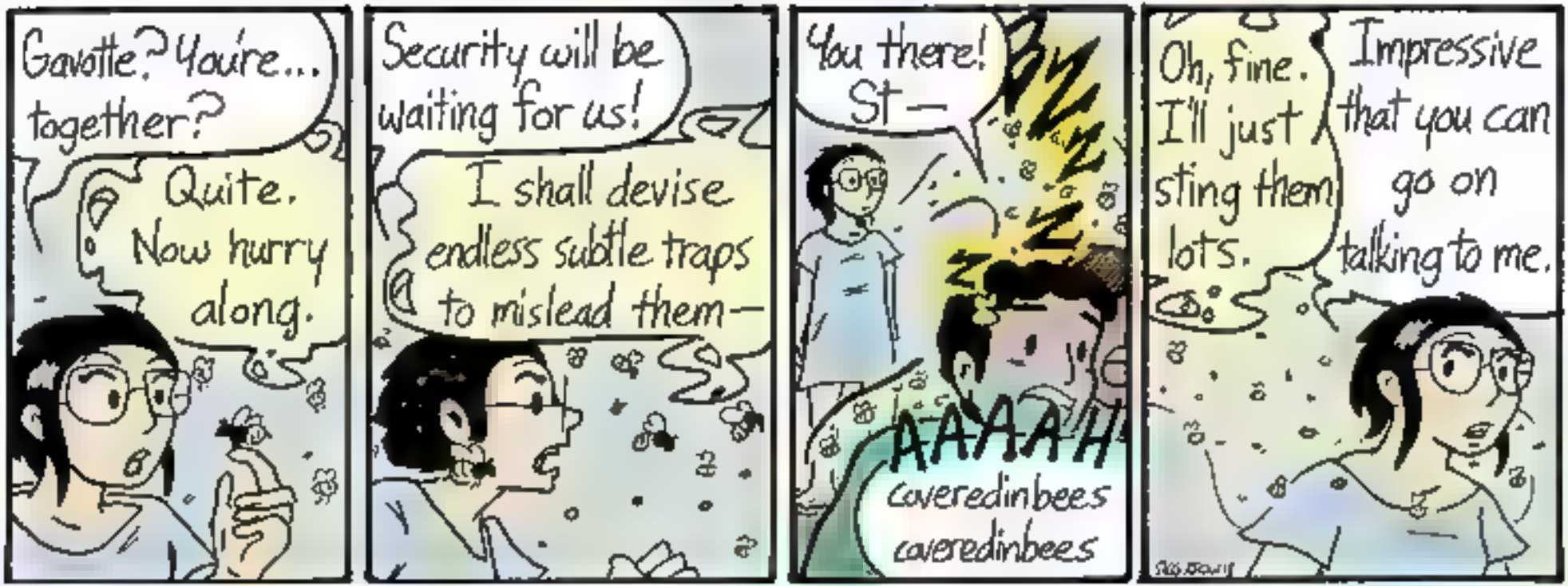
So your daughter wants to return to... Lovetron, but you—
No time to hash out strategies.
Ladies, on the bus! Let's blow this joint!
Wait for me!
Sorry, this metaphorical vehicle is for the swarm. We can't let you board.
Are you telling me to... buzz off?
That pun is just one of many reasons why.

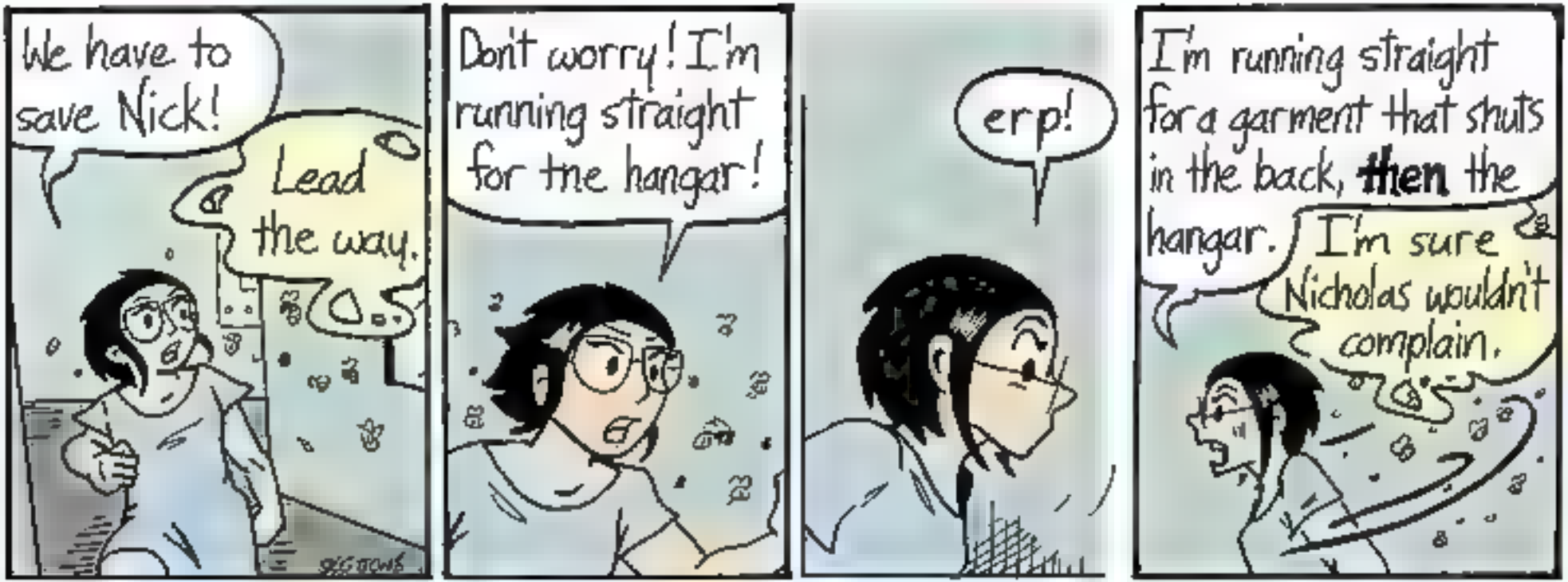

Rears in seats, girls! See you on the other side!
Wait! I have to save Nick!
Job one is saving you.
Me? Am I in dang—
FWIT
Should she be talking this deep into surgical prep?
Never mind, hard yes, got it.


If you weren't supposed to wake up—
Well, obviously. What were you about to do?
Extract your brain for permanent extirpation.
What?
It's, er, standard procedure—
Brain extraction is my department!
Sorry you've missed the fun.
Almost dissected by a division I should run. I'm so done with leaning in.


Nothing personal, Doctor.
Mr. Green will hear about this!
Your surgery was scheduled on Mr. Green's order.
That rat.
Now I'm definitely not going out to dinner with him.
That's it. I'm bringing out the thiopental.
I knew he was evil, but this is just rude.

I'm warning you, don't call Security!
Or what?
BZZZZZ
YAH!
coveredinbees coveredinbees
Thanks. All I had was "or they'll see my gross post-extirpation toenails."
Now. Where's the tea?

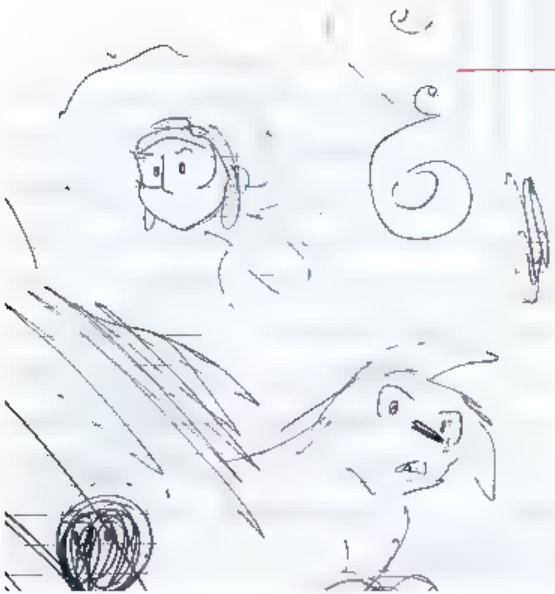

Gavotte? You're... together?
Quite. Now hurry along.
Security will be waiting for us!
I shall devise endless subtle traps to mislead them—
You there! St—
BZZZZ
AAAAH
coveredinbees coveredinbees
Oh, fine. I'll just sting them lots.
Impressive that you can go on talking to me.


We have to save Nick!
Lead the way.
Don't worry! I'm running straight for the hangar!
erp!
I'm running straight for a garment that shuts in the back, then the hangar.
I'm sure Nicholas wouldn't complain.

Nick! We're here!
Nick?
His brain's been removed.
We're too late.
Oh **walnuts.**

DEAD
NOW

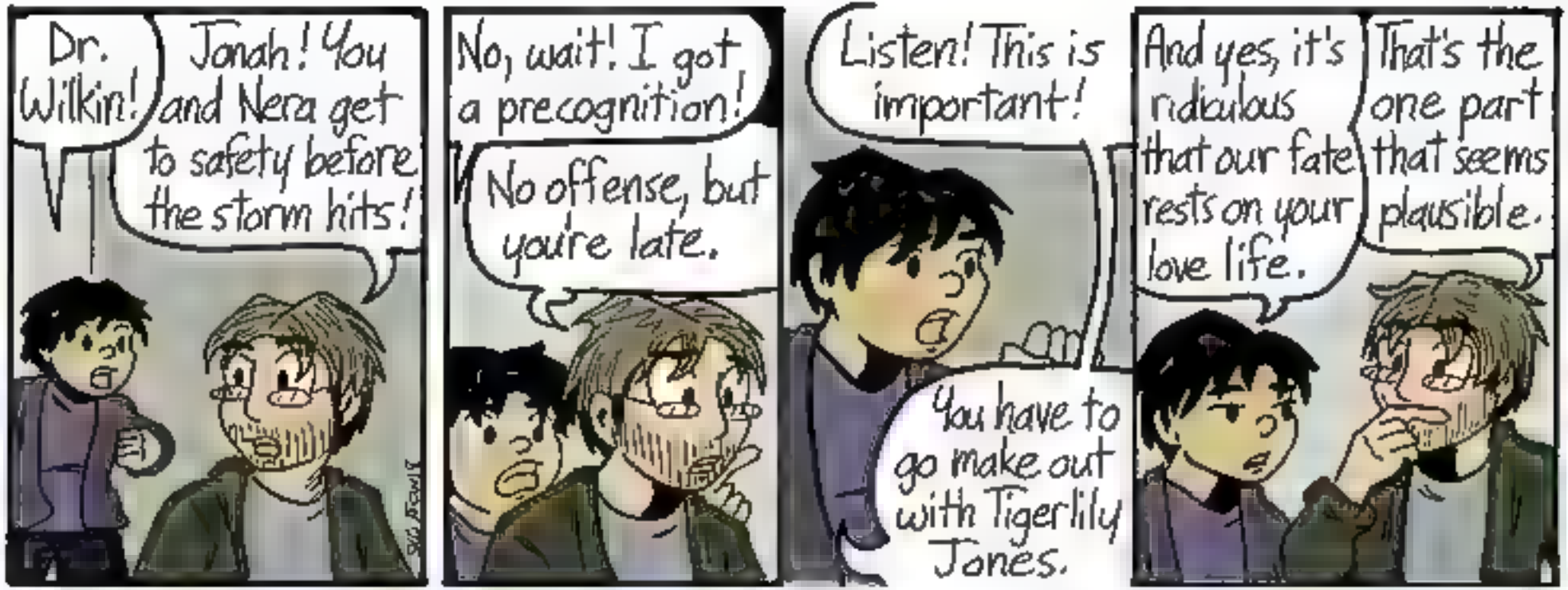
ARK



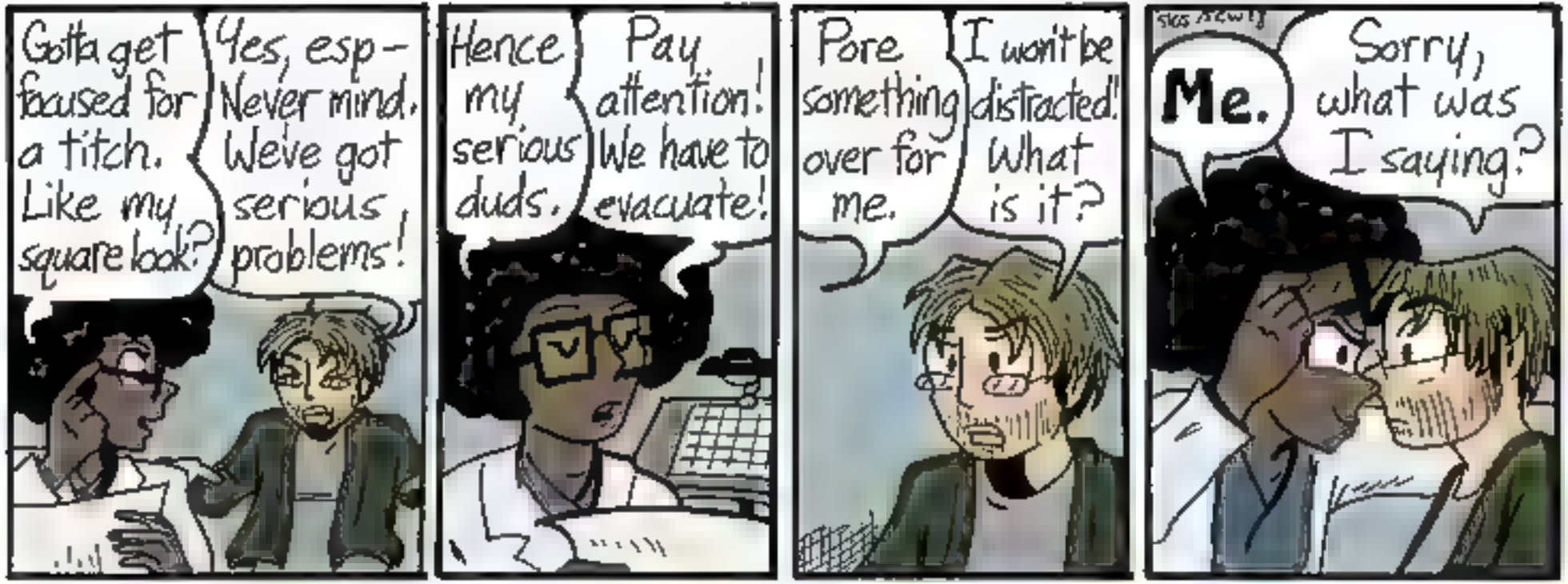
This is bad. This is real bad. Why did I take this job when Mr. Green offered it?
I was trying to play it smart! I was trying to keep our enemy close!
Now it turns out he was **everywhere**, laughing at us the whole time.
I thought you took it because we got Jacuzzi access.
We were supposed to use it as an **espionage** Jacuzzi!

What stopped the party, Feds?
Nick's been kidnapped and we've lost contact with Dr. Lee!
Far out! Time to rise up against the Man!
How do you do that? That... optimism thing?
No lasting harm may come to a vessel of the Cosmic Funk.
News from Marcie. We're all gonna die.
Who are you going to believe, me or the tiny sadness box?

Marcie's still at the Maragda Buiding. She says were in the path of a freak hurricane.
This is A-Sig's doing.
Well, they won't take us down. We'll have to evacuate Annex One.
What about Nick?
Still on it. I can handle two crises at once.
Marcie also says they're out of toner.
Three crises! All is lost!


Dr. Wilkin!
Jonah! You and Nera get to safety before the storm hits!
No, wait! I got a precognition!
No offense, but you're late.
Listen! This is important!
You have to go make out with Tigerlily Jones.
And yes, it's ridiculous that our fate rests on your love life.
That's the one part that seems plausible.

Tigerlily doesn't want to get involved with me...
I literally could not care less. Just passing it on.
We've known each other for a while. Insane as she is, she can't do much to surprise me—
Hello, Dr. Wilkin. Come peep some schematics.
Though that outfit sure is trying.
Shush. You know I make it work.


Gotta get focused for a titch. Like my square look?
Yes, esp - Never mind. We've got serious problems!
Hence my serious duds.
Pay attention! We have to evacuate!
Pore something over for me.
I won't be distracted! What is it?
Me.
Sorry, what was I saying?

Photos - the nightwings by flamehero6106-dbwbr13.png

Home View

Paste

Courier New 11

Picture Paint drawing Date and time Insert object

Find Replace Select all

Clipboard Font Paragraph Insert Editing

Lee: With all my hours in VR, I'm ashamed I didn't figure this place out long ago.

Ao: This is out most advanced rig.

PANEL TWO

Ao: We spared no expense on this one.

Lee (poking at the rough wood walls): I can tell. Usually I'd have seen some visual artefacts by now.

PANEL THREE

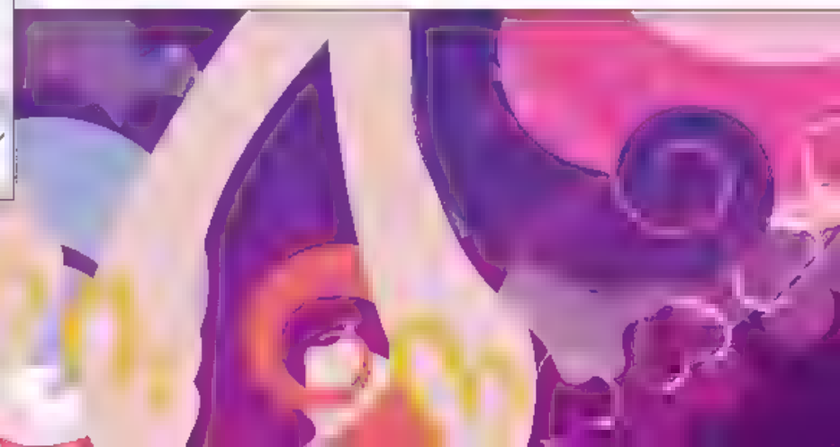
Lee: Immersion wise, it's pitch perfect. But everything's just a little too weird here to be real.

PANEL FOUR

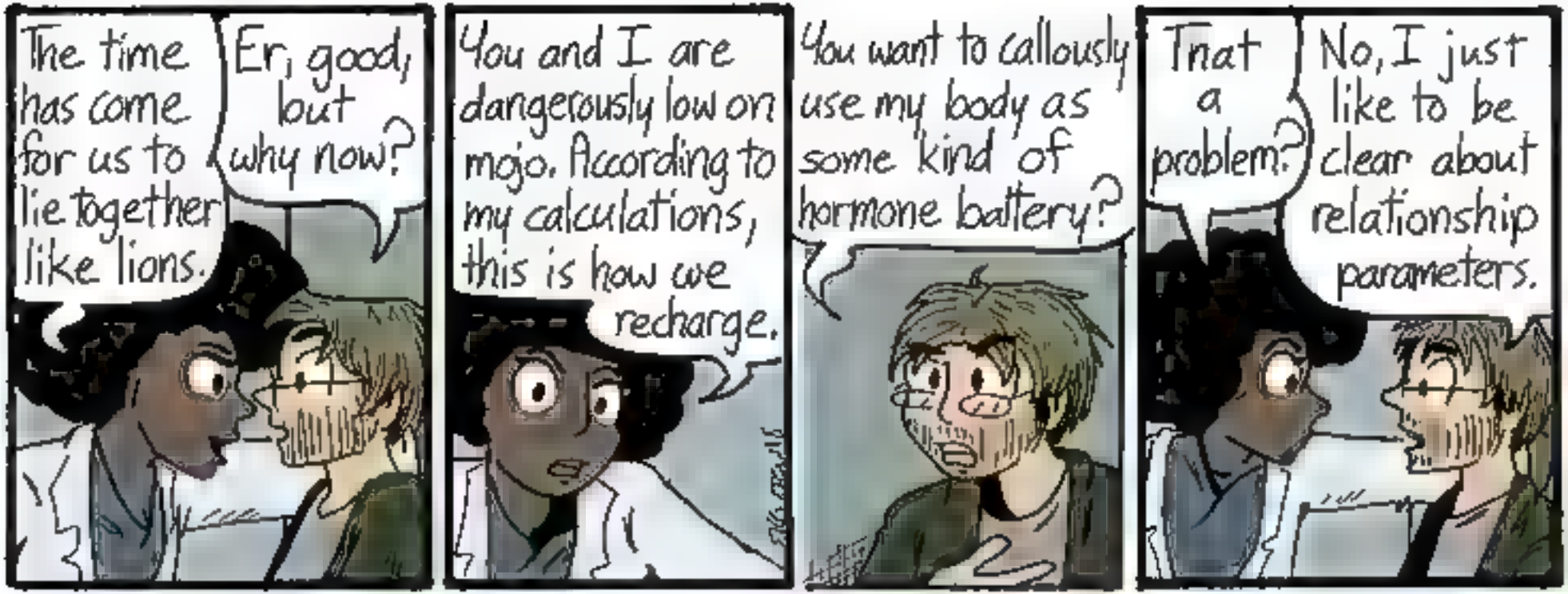
Ao: Our records show you once had a clockwork pimp stick vs. magical notary stamp duel.

Lee: That doesn't count! I was possessed by a zombie at the time!

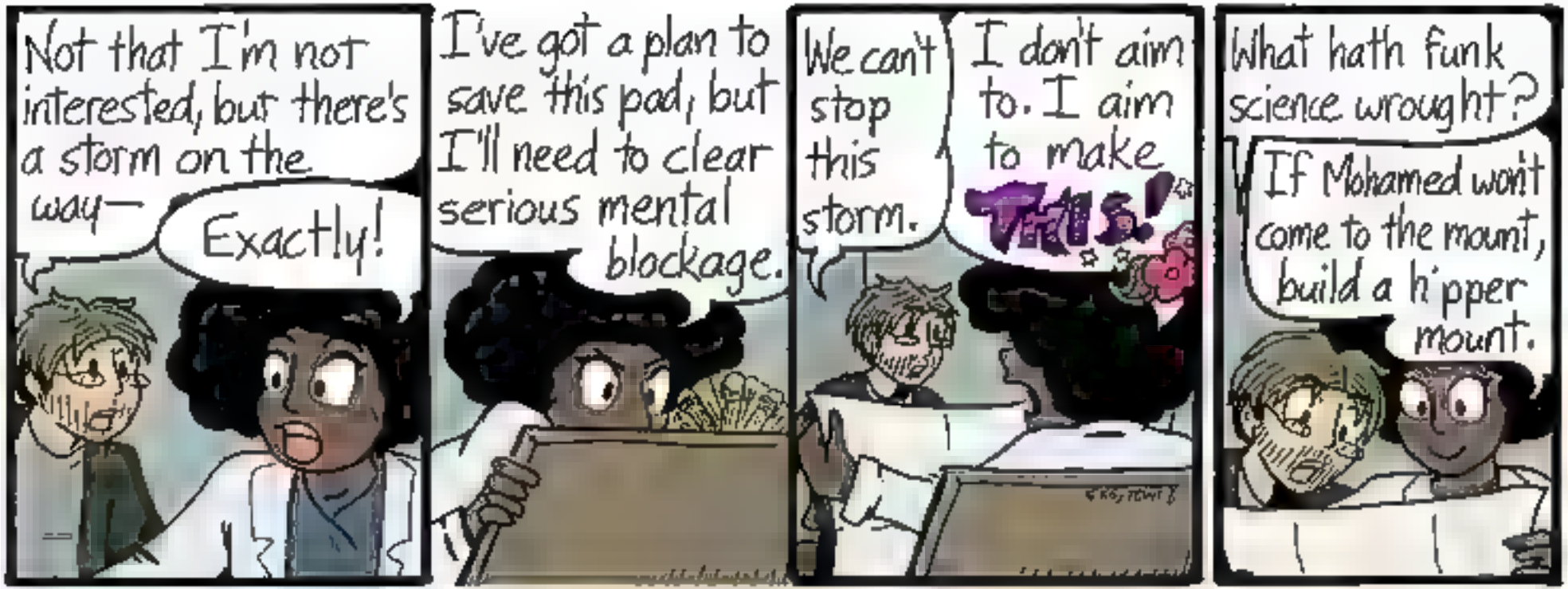
100%



Star Wars Knights ... Star Wars Knights of ... System Shock 2 Undertale Ziggurat Metrodiant...


The time has come for us to lie together like lions.
Er, good, but why now?
You and I are dangerously low on mojo. According to my calculations, this is how we recharge.
You want to callously use my body as some kind of hormone battery?
That a problem?
No, I just like to be clear about relationship parameters.

To stare down the Man, we need to restore our internal balance.
A shamaness told me that within me are two fightin' wolves, one evil, one good. I asked her which would win.
"Whichever one is piloting a mobile battle fortress," she said.
Wild guess, was "the shamaness" you?
She spoke from a mirror. Shamanesses do that.

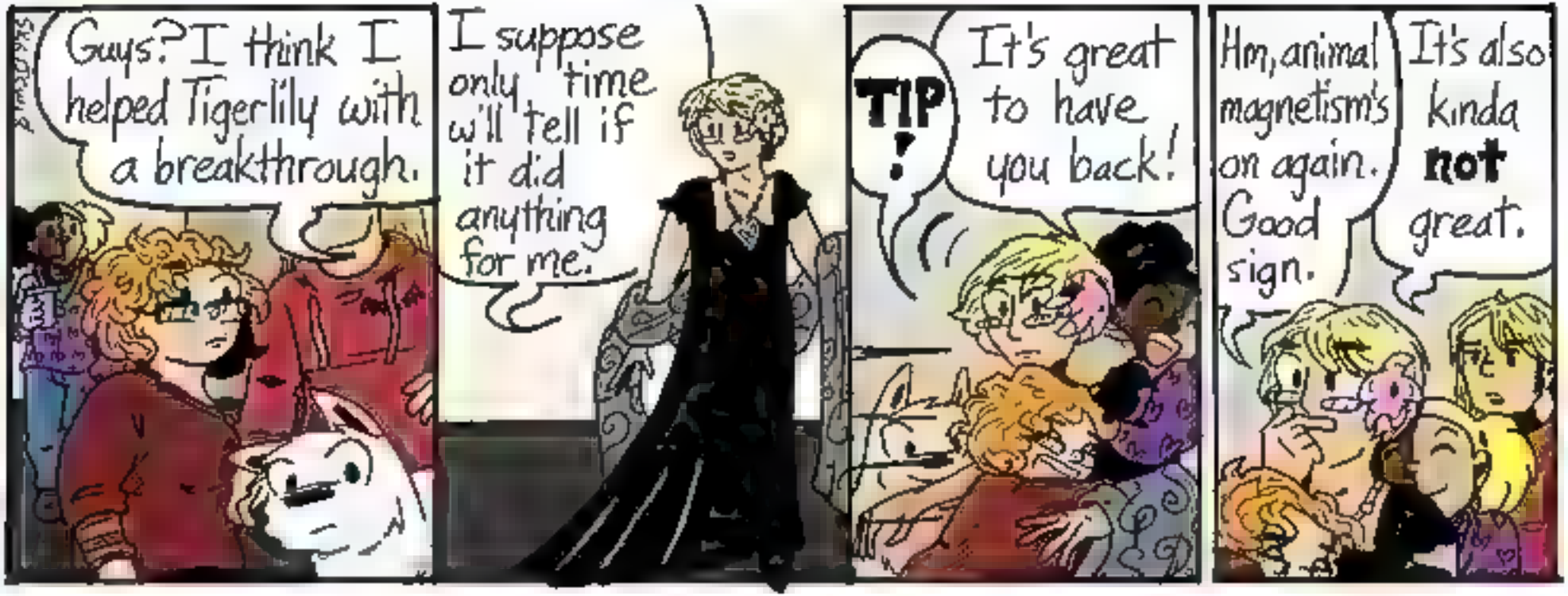

Not that I'm not interested, but there's a storm on the way—
Exactly!
I've got a plan to save this pad, but I'll need to clear serious mental blockage.
We can't stop this storm.
I don't aim to. I aim to make THIS!
What hath funk science wrought?
If Mohamed won't come to the mount, build a h'pper mount.

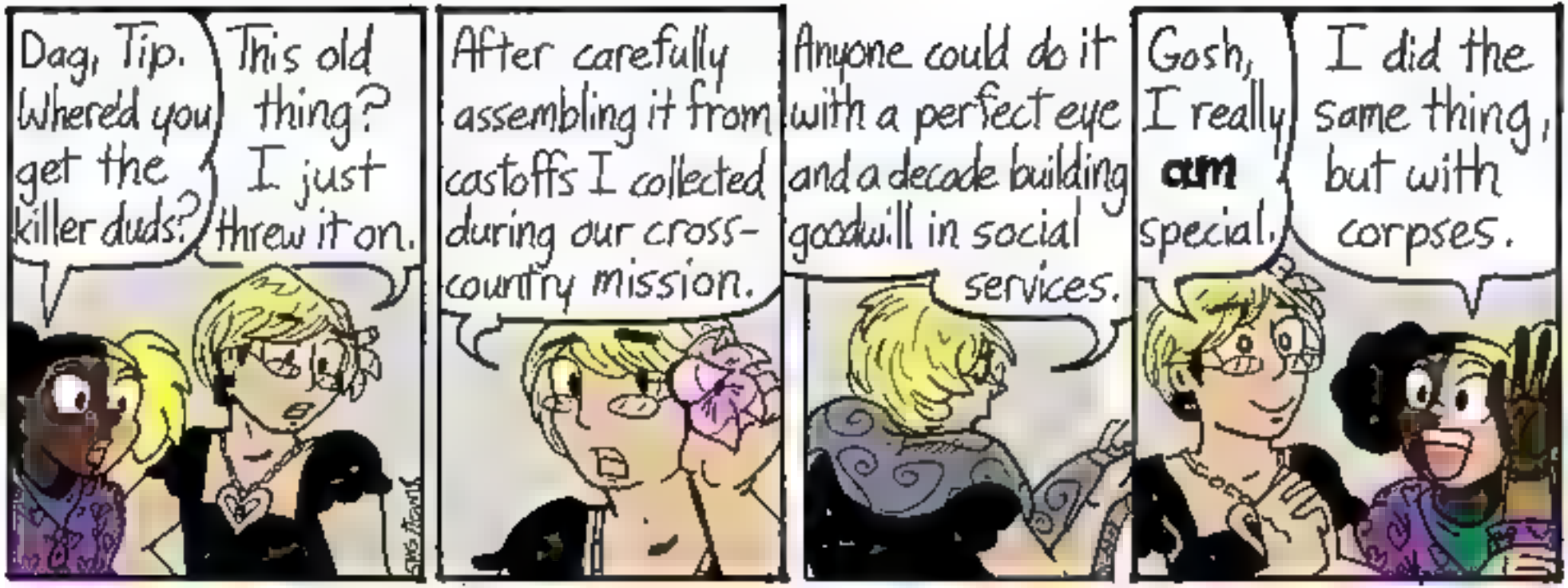
Aint this something. I thought you'd sweep me off my feet.
I'm not in peak form.
All I can say is I've loved you, completely and without reason, since the day we met.
No matter what happens, spending the night with you would be the greatest of honors.
Mm. Yet the sweeping happens.
And if I remember correctly, there's a trampoline down the hall.

So you're in accord with our mojo communion?
Agh, I don't know. This isn't what I pictured.
I wanted something special. Fireworks! Orchestral music!
The very stars ought to shift in their courses!
Like when normal people fall in love!
You're not in spitting distance of normal, even with rocket spit.

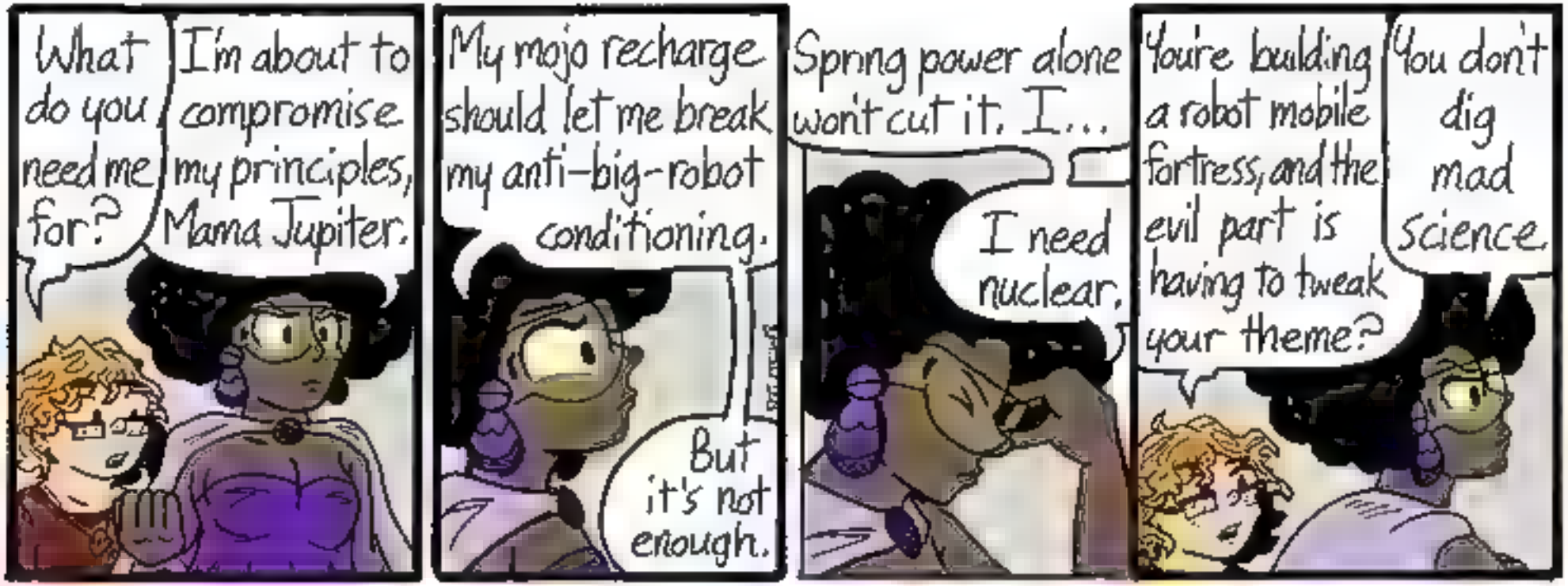
Hey, boss!
Chris! Marcie! You braved the storm?
It's an all-out coup at the office! Dr. Engelbright called for your dismissal!
That's fine.
I'm just glad you're okay. It doesn't matter who's in charge.
Great, add "mind-altering brain worms" to the list of crises.
C'mon. Tip's off telling Tigerlily not to sleep with him.

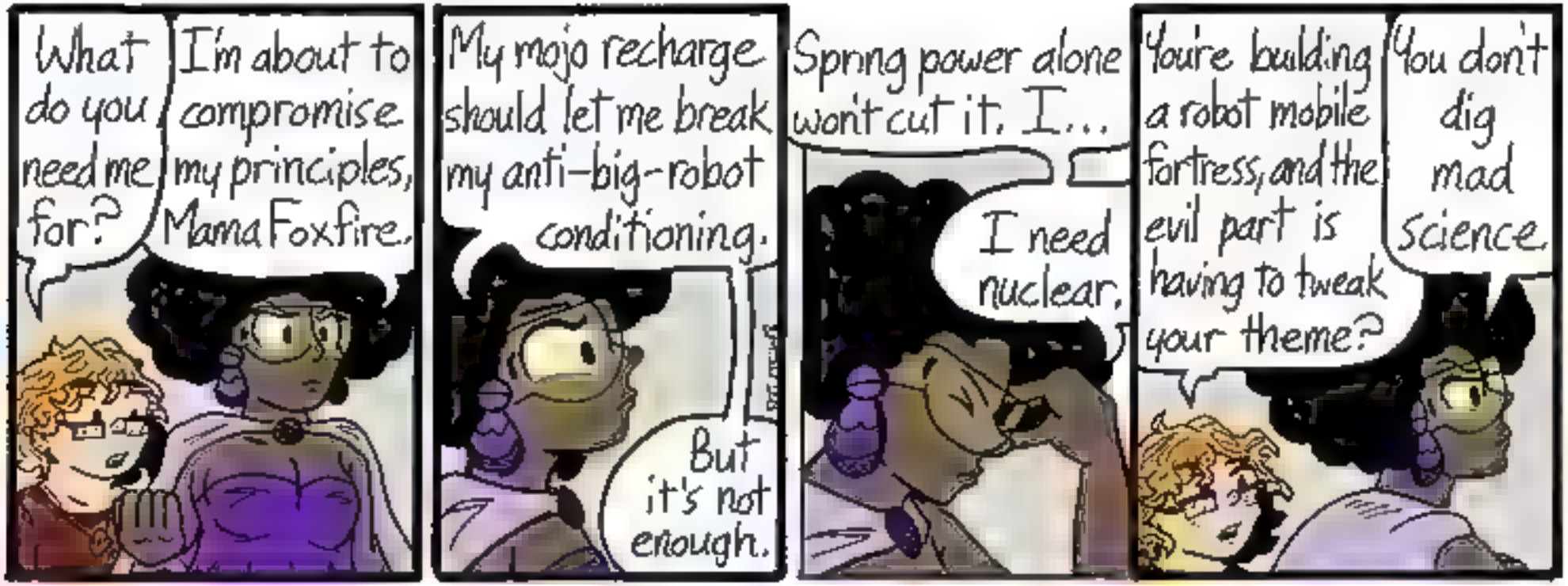
Tip's trying **not** to hook up with Dr. Jones?
He said he was going to talk sense into her about the storm
This is an emergency. Tip knows how to set his feelings aside and focus on evacuation.
OH HI! TIP ASK HITTY TO FETCH 2 HARVEY WALLBANGERS + BARRY WHITE LP!
You've worked with the man **how** long?
Leave my Galliano alone!


Guys? I think I helped Tigerlily with a breakthrough.
I suppose only time will tell if it did anything for me.
TIP!
It's great to have you back!
Hm, animal magnetism's on again. Good sign.
It's also kinda not great.


Dag, Tip. Where'd you get the killer duds?
This old thing? I just threw it on.
After carefully assembling it from castoffs I collected during our cross-country mission.
Anyone could do it with a perfect eye and a decade building goodwill in social services.
Gosh, I really am special.
I did the same thing, but with corpses.

Mama Foxfire! My woman!
Dr. Jones! I, er, saw Tip.
He's in a positive groove. But my work has just begun.
For the next stage, I'll need you.
Okay, but I should tell Chris first.
I mean to do science.
I know. Chris likes it when I do science with other girls.


What do you need me for?
I'm about to compromise my principles, Mama Jupiter.
My mojo recharge should let me break my anti-big-robot conditioning.
But it's not enough.
Spring power alone won't cut it. I...
I need nuclear.
You're building a robot mobile fortress, and the evil part is having to tweak your theme?
You don't dig mad science.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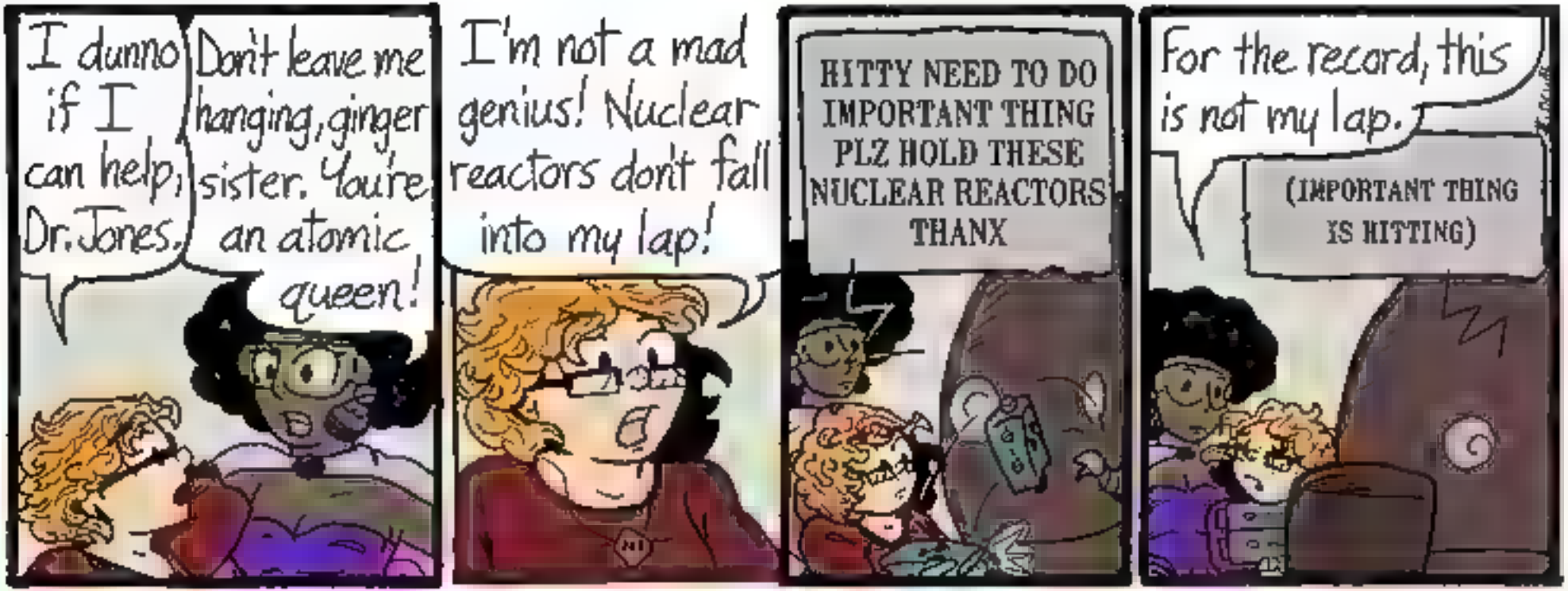
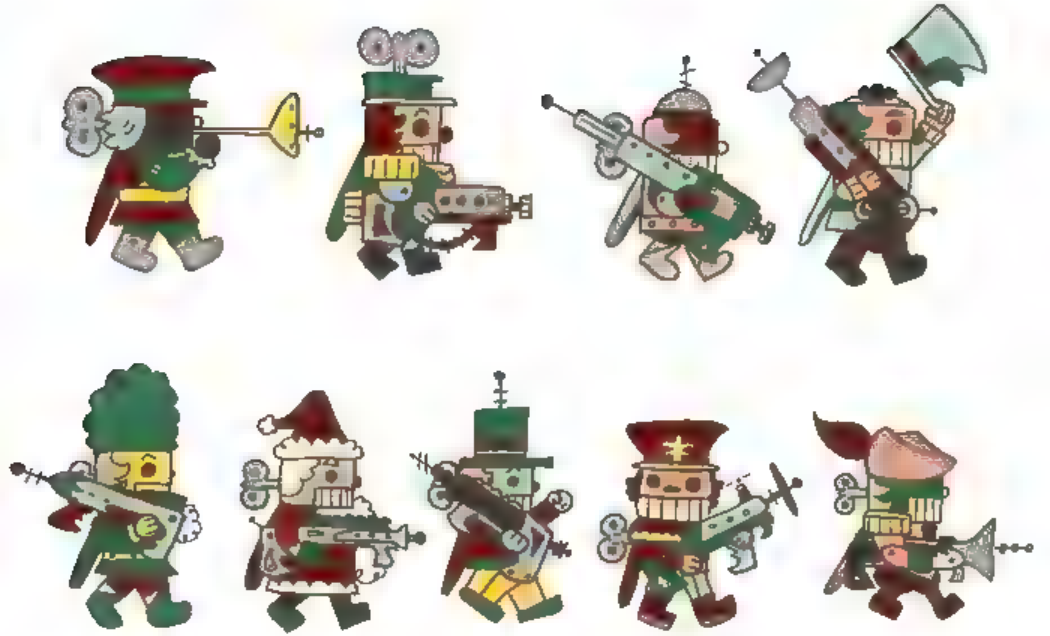
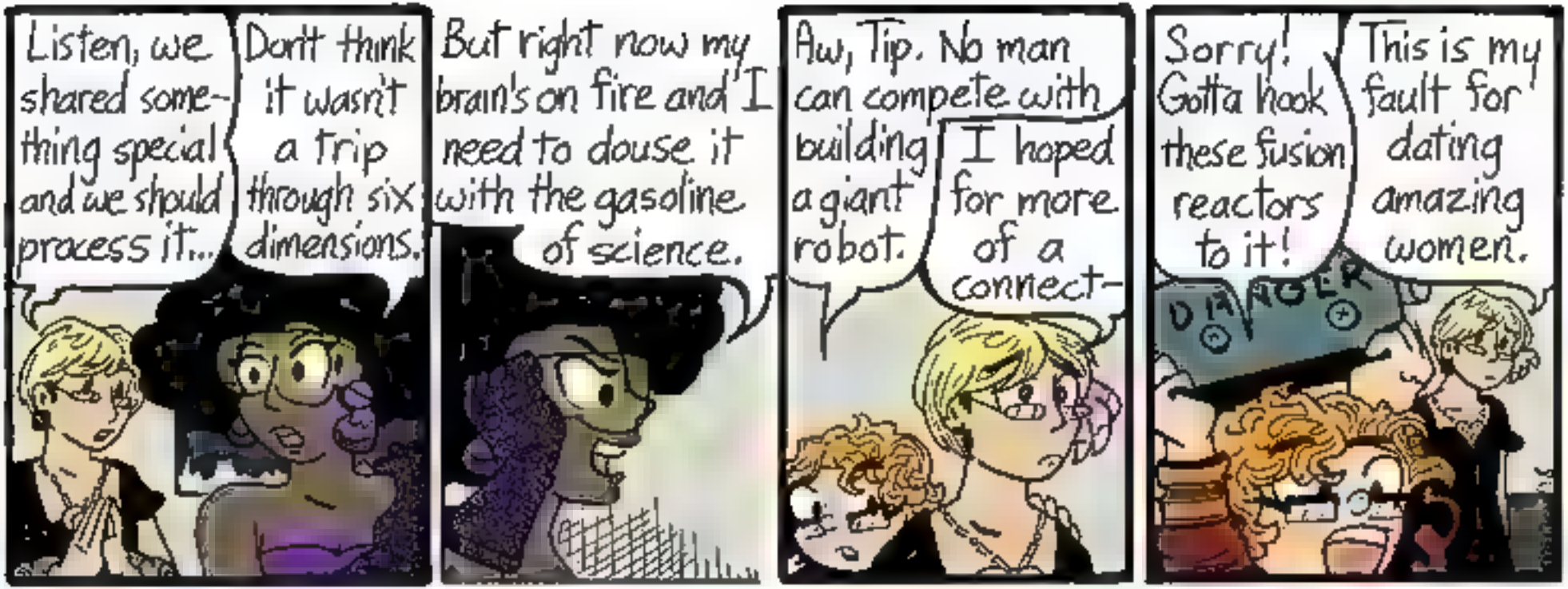
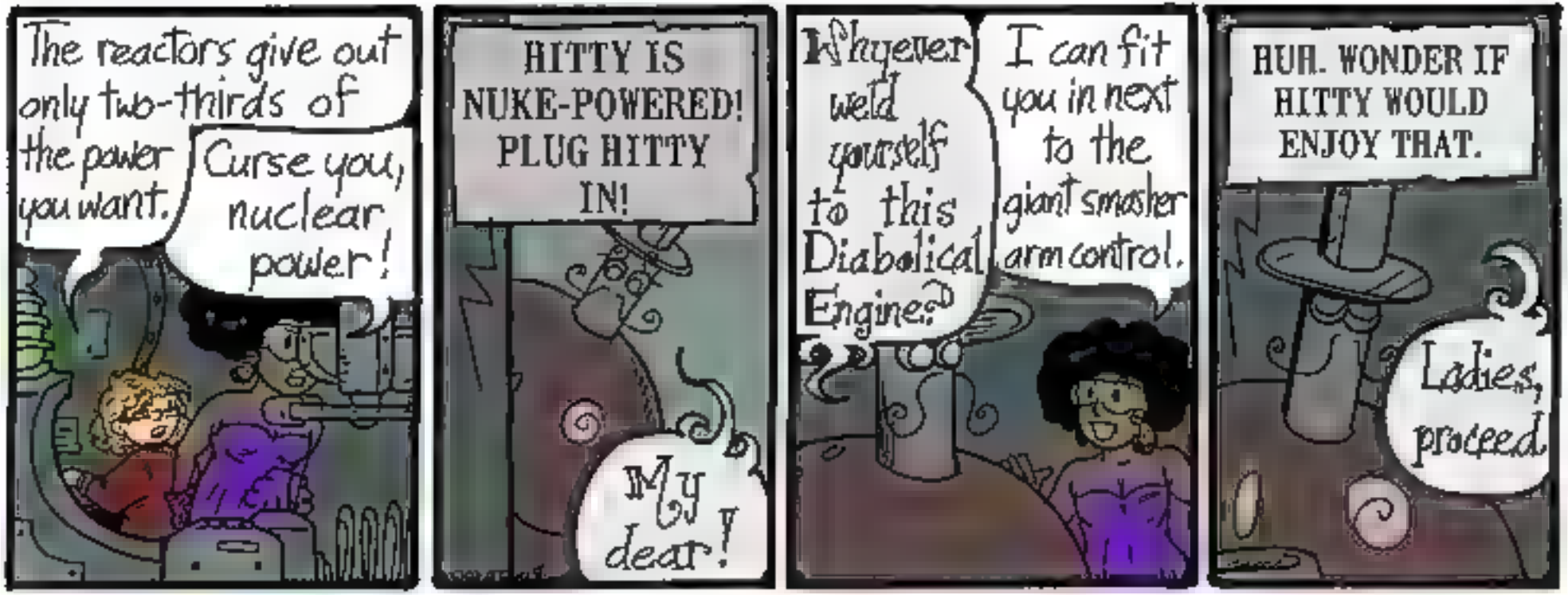
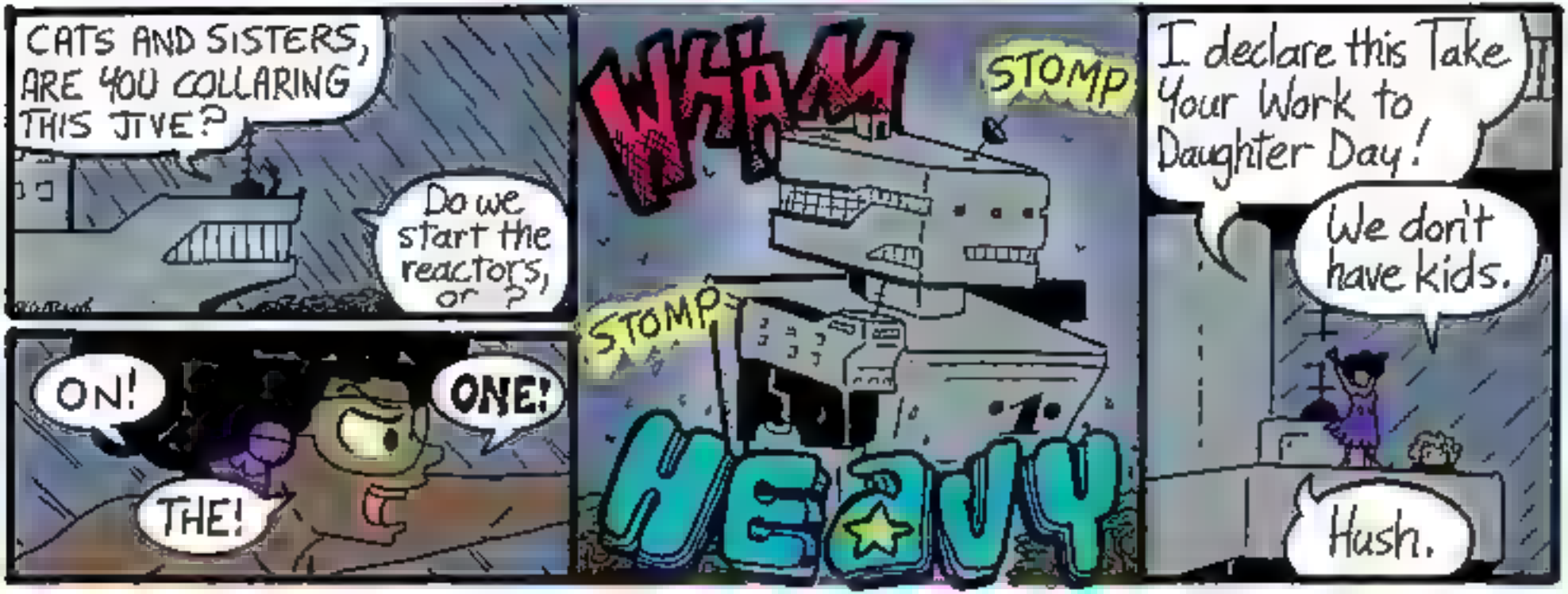
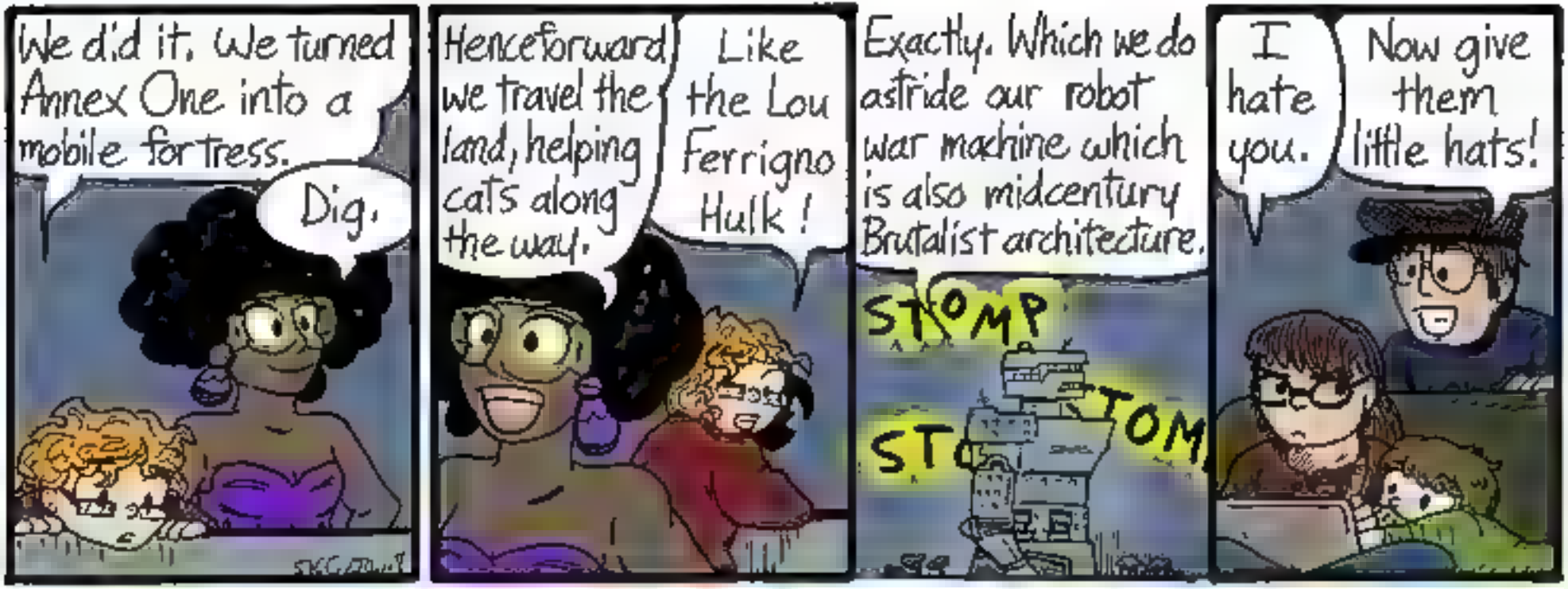

I dunno if I can help, Dr. Jones.
Don't leave me hanging, ginger sister. You're an atomic queen!
I'm not a mad genius! Nuclear reactors don't fall into my lap!
KITTY NEED TO DO IMPORTANT THING PLZ HOLD THESE NUCLEAR REACTORS THANX
For the record, this is not my lap.
(IMPORTANT THING IS HITTING)

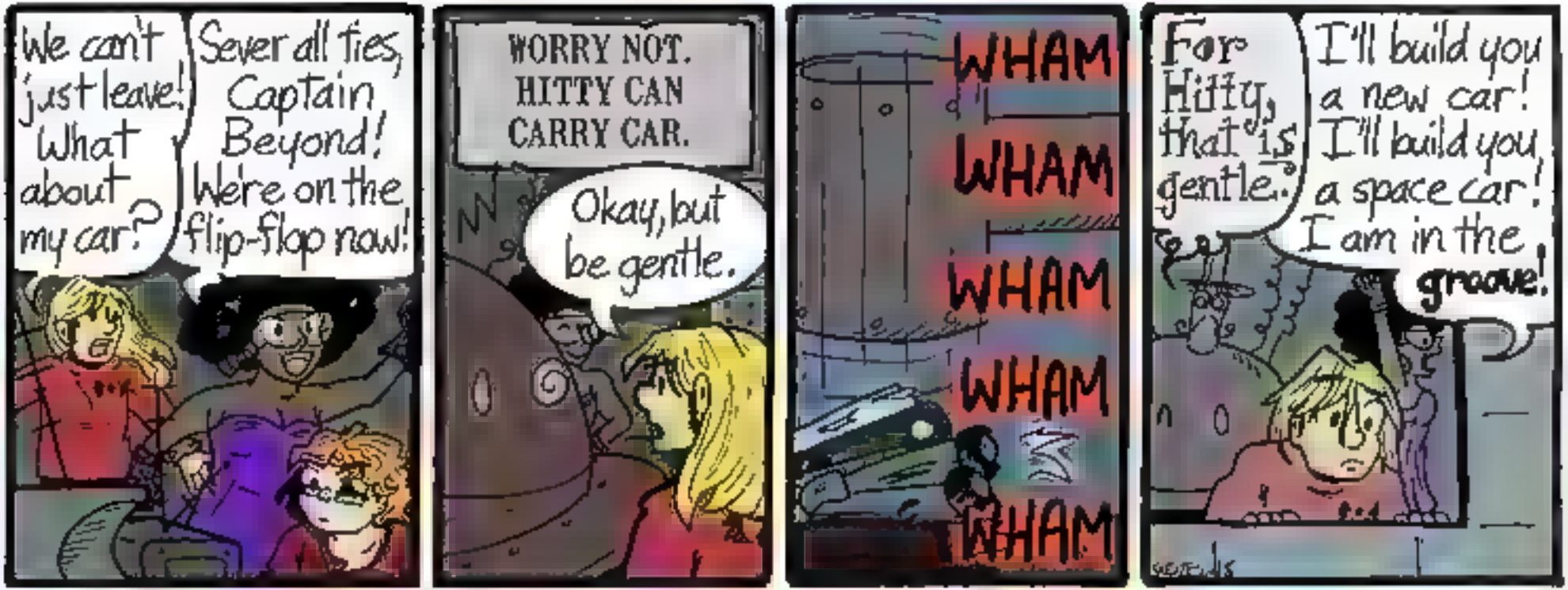


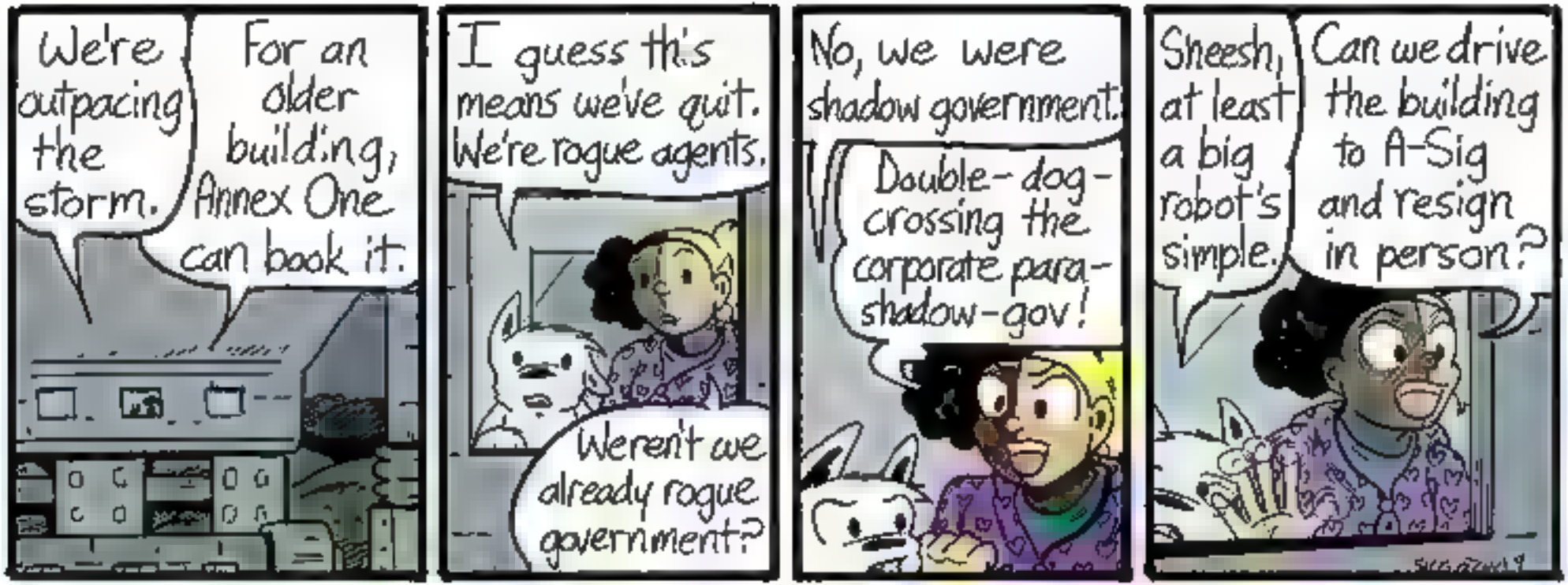

Listen, we shared something special and we should process it...
Don't think it wasn't a trip through six dimensions.
But right now my brain's on fire and I need to douse it with the gasoline of science.
Aw, Tip. No man can compete with building a giant robot.
I hoped for more of a connect-
Sorry! Gotta hook these fusion reactors to it!
This is my fault for dating amazing women.

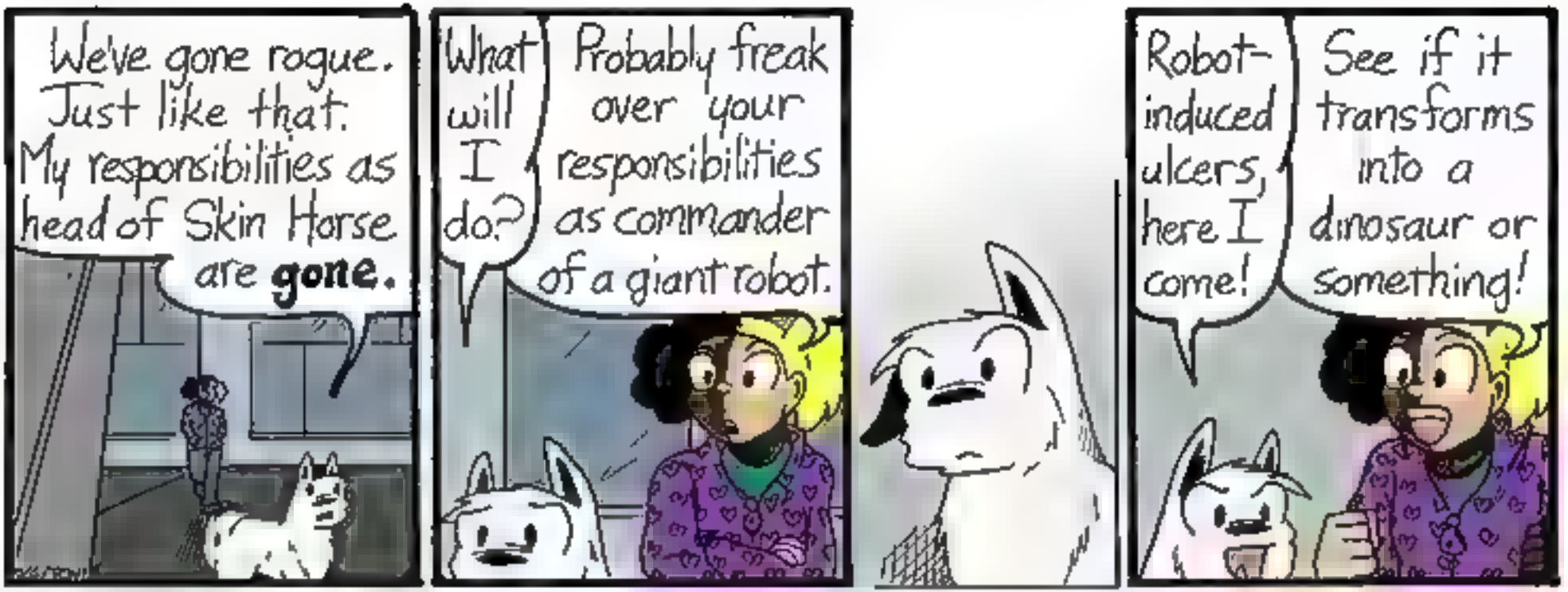

The reactors give out only two-thirds of the power you want.
Curse you, nuclear power!
HITTY IS NUKE-POWERED! PLUG HITTY IN!
My dear!
Whatever weld yourself to this Diabolical Engine?
I can fit you in next to the giant smasher arm control.
HUH. WONDER IF HITTY WOULD ENJOY THAT.
Ladies, proceed.

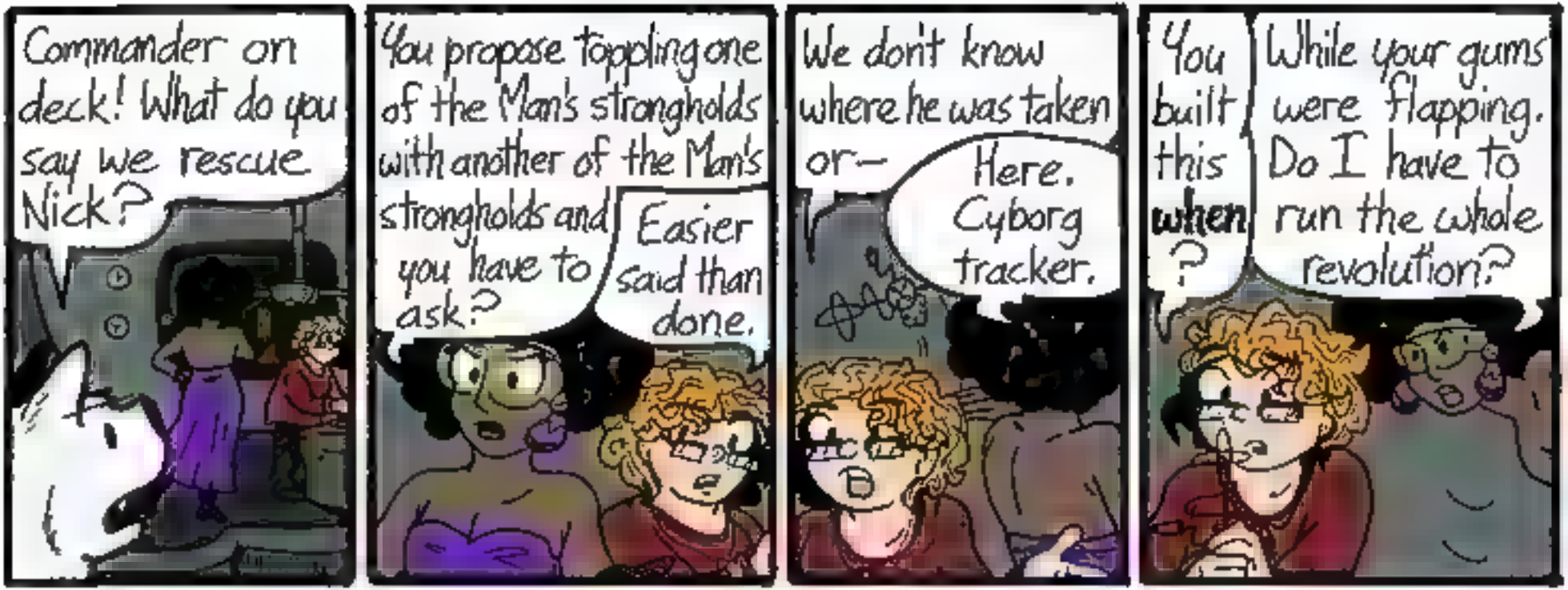

CATS AND SISTERS, ARE YOU COLLARING THIS JIVE?
Do we start the reactors, or?
ON!
ONE!
THE!
WHAM
STOMP
STOMP
HEAVY
I declare this Take Your Work to Daughter Day!
We don't have kids.
Hush.

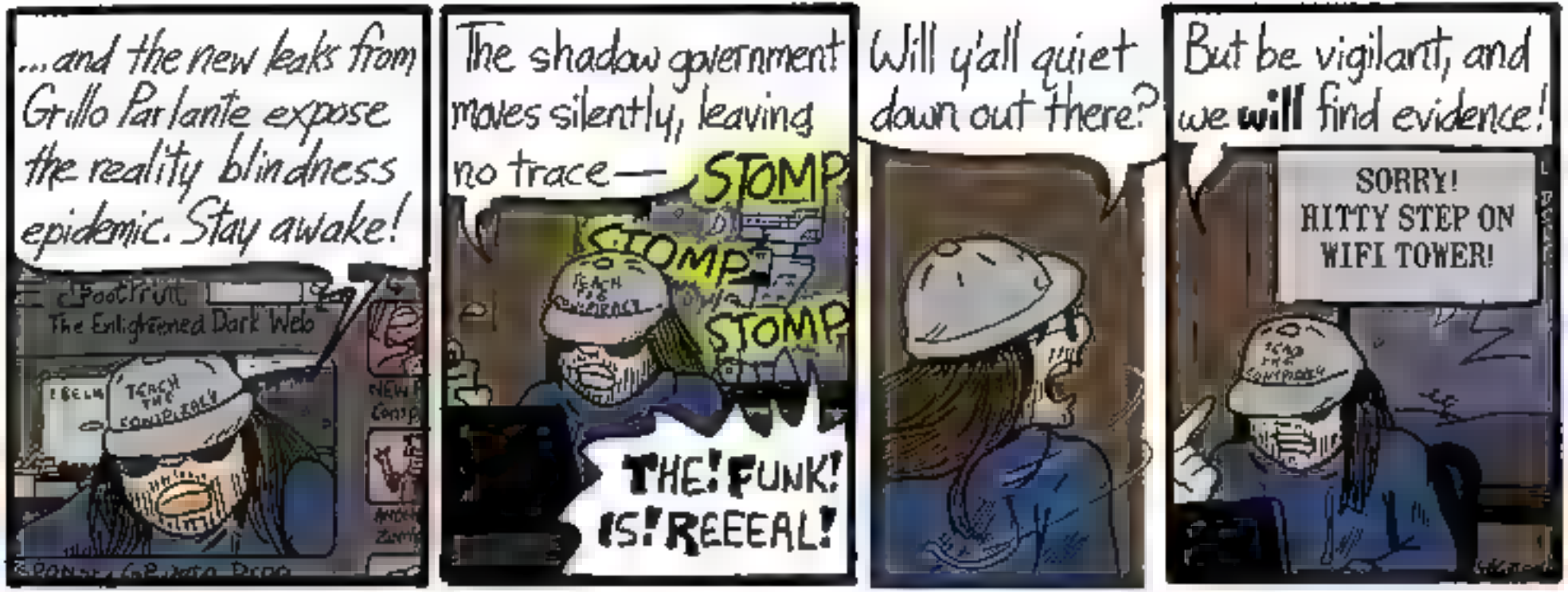

We did it. We turned Annex One into a mobile fortress.
Dig.
Henceforward we travel the land, helping cats along the way.
Like the Lou Ferrigno Hulk!
Exactly. Which we do astride our robot war machine which is also midcentury Brutalist architecture.
STOMP
STOMP
I hate you.
Now give them little hats!

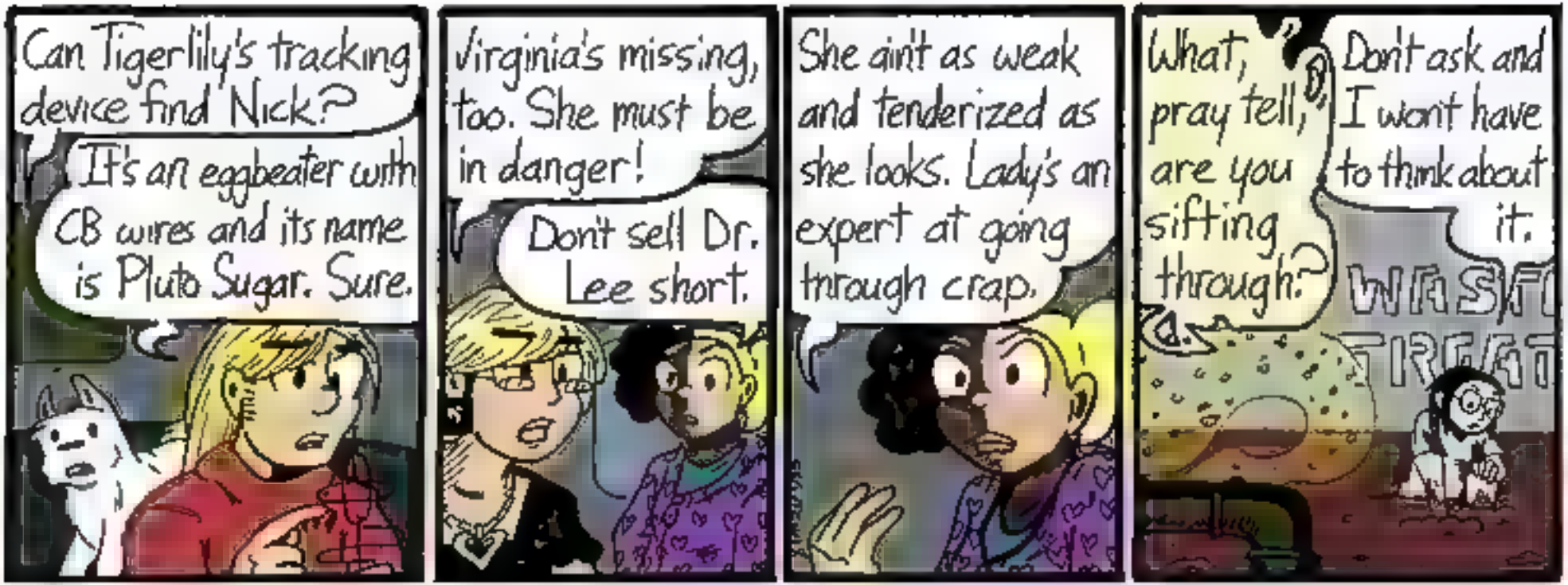

We can't just leave! What about my car?
Sever all ties, Captain Beyond! We're on the flip-flop now!
WORRY NOT. HITTY CAN CARRY CAR.
Okay, but be gentle.
WHAM
WHAM
WHAM
WHAM
WHAM
For Hitty, that is gentle.
I'll build you a new car! I'll build you a space car! I am in the groove!

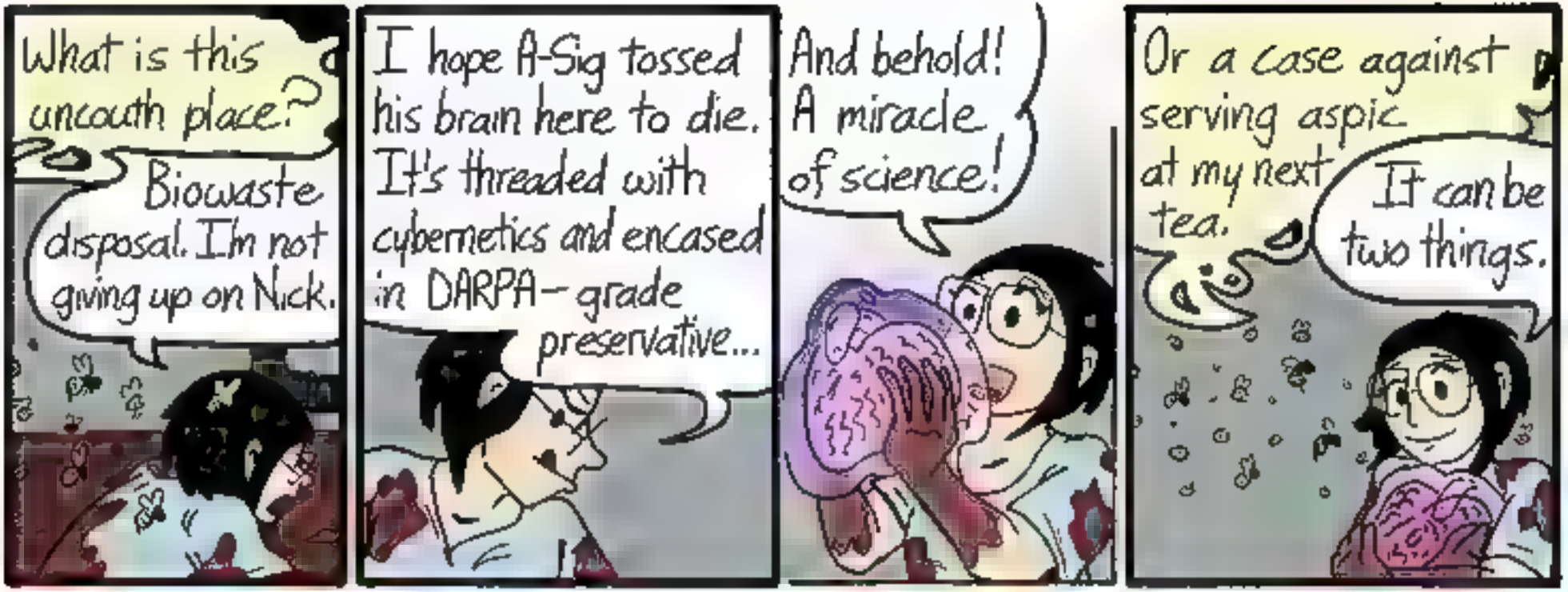

We're outpacing the storm.
For an older building, Annex One can book it.
I guess this means we've quit. We're rogue agents.
Weren't we already rogue government?
No, we were shadow government.
Double-dog-crossing the corporate para-shadow-gov!
Sheesh, at least a big robot's simple.
Can we drive the building to A-Sig and resign in person?

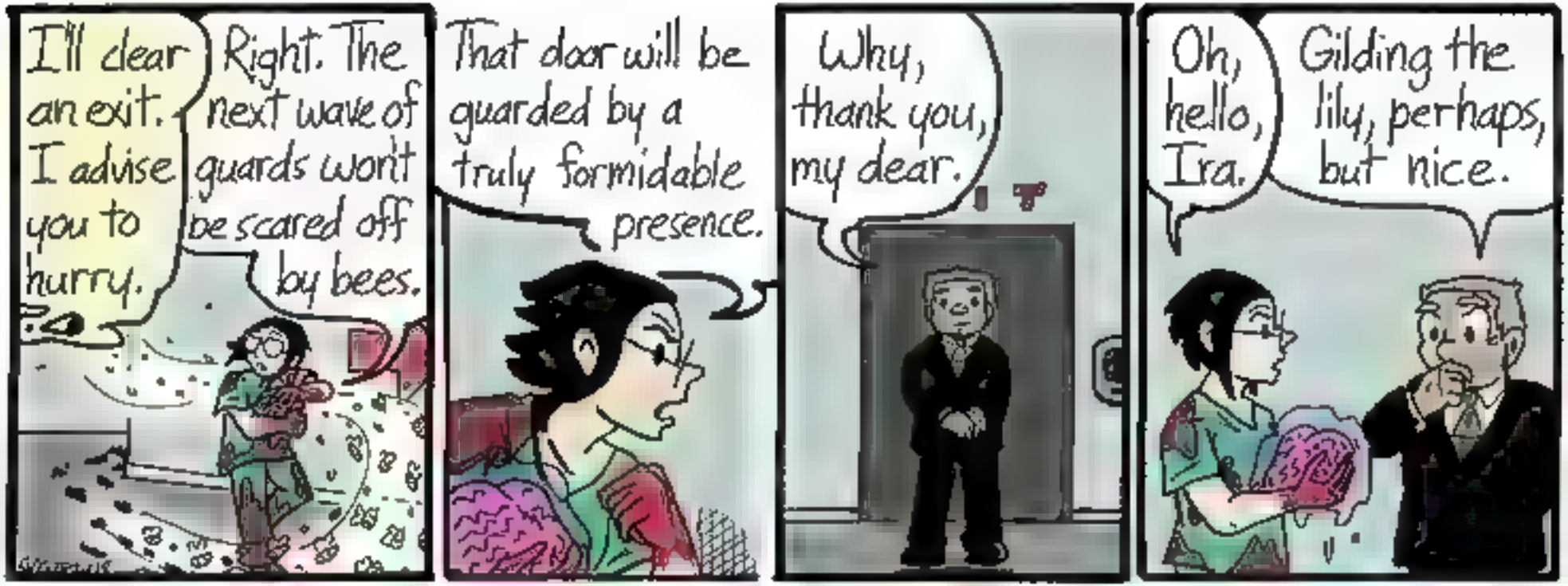

We've gone rogue. Just like that. My responsibilities as head of Skin Horse are **gone.**
What will I do?
Probably freak over your responsibilities as commander of a giant robot.
Robot-induced ulcers, here I come!
See if it transforms into a dinosaur or something!

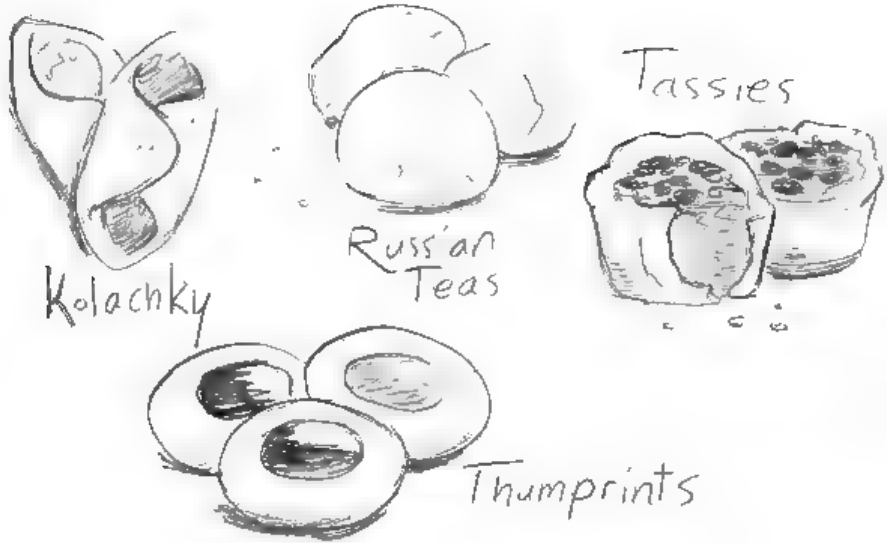

Commander on deck! What do you say we rescue Nick?
You propose toppling one of the Man's strongholds with another of the Man's strongholds and you have to ask?
Easier said than done.
We don't know where he was taken or—
Here. Cyborg tracker.
You built this when?
While your gums were flapping. Do I have to run the whole revolution?

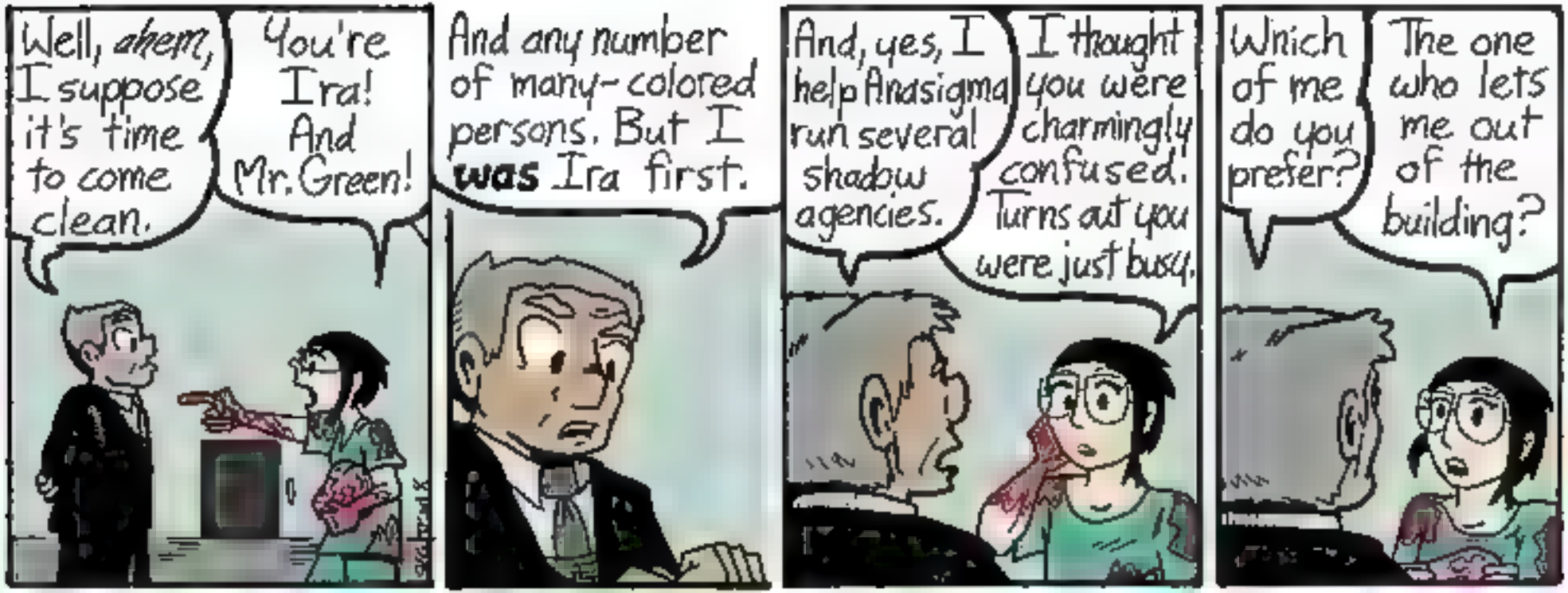

...and the new leaks from Grillo Parlante expose the reality blindness epidemic. Stay awake!
Bootfruit
The Enlightened Dark Web
I BELIEVE
TEACH THE CONTROVERSY
NEW! Comp
ANDREW ZUCKER
The shadow government moves silently, leaving no trace—
STOMP
STOMP
STOMP
TEACH THE CONTROVERSY
THE! FUNK! IS! REEEAL!
Will y'all quiet down out there?
But be vigilant, and we will find evidence!
SORRY! HITTY STEP ON WIFI TOWER!
TEACH THE CONTROVERSY


Can Tigerlily's tracking device find Nick?
It's an eggbeater with CB wires and its name is Pluto Sugar. Sure.
Virginia's missing, too. She must be in danger!
Don't sell Dr. Lee short.
She ain't as weak and tenderized as she looks. Lady's an expert at going through crap.
What, pray tell, are you sifting through?
Don't ask and I won't have to think about it.

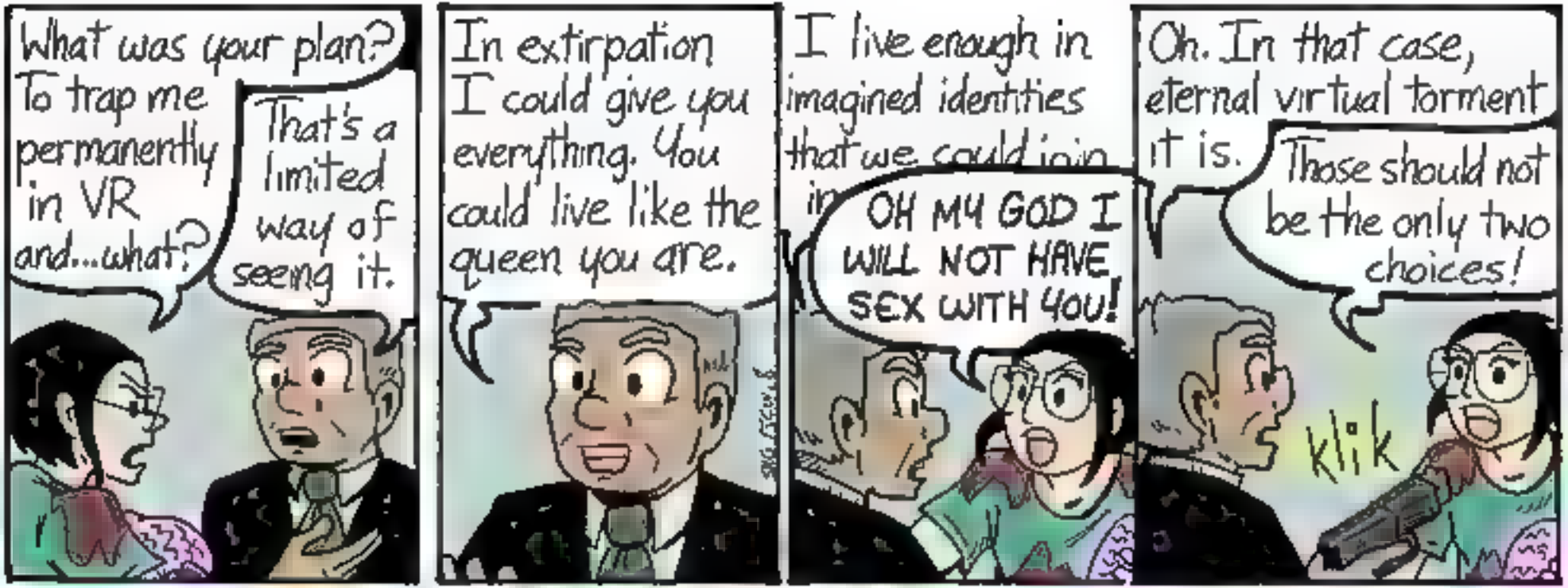

What is this uncouth place?
Biowaste disposal. I'm not giving up on Nick.
I hope A-Sig tossed his brain here to die. It's threaded with cybernetics and encased in DARPA-grade preservative...
And behold! A miracle of science!
Or a case against serving aspic at my next tea.
It can be two things.

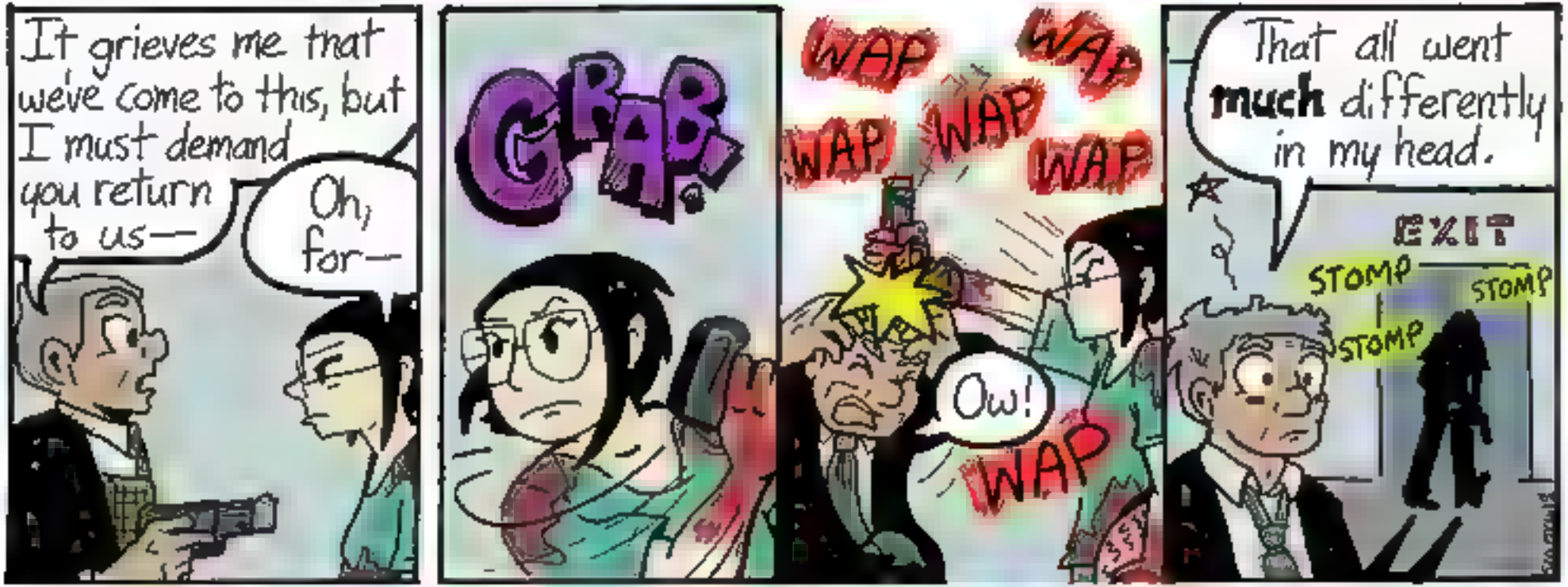

I'll clear an exit. I advise you to hurry.
Right. The next wave of guards won't be scared off by bees.
That door will be guarded by a truly formidable presence.
Why, thank you, my dear.
Oh, hello, Ira.
Gilding the lily, perhaps, but nice.


Kolachky
Russian Teas
Tassies
Thumprints


Well, ahem, I suppose it's time to come clean.
You're Ira! And Mr. Green!
And any number of many-colored persons. But I **was** Ira first.
And, yes, I help Anasigma run several shadow agencies.
I thought you were charmingly confused. Turns out you were just busy.
Which of me do you prefer?
The one who lets me out of the building?

I'm so **stupid!** You've been using the weather machine I gave you!
Let's discuss this in my offices.
And you were going to extract my brain!
A moment of weakness on my part.
A "moment of weakness" is eating a whole can of Pringles!
Surely you, of all people, know the temptation.
Yes, but then I buy a new can for the break room!
I'm still talking about brains, but all right.


What was your plan? To trap me permanently in VR and...what?
That's a limited way of seeing it.
In extirpation I could give you everything. You could live like the queen you are.
I live enough in imagined identities that we could join in
OH MY GOD I WILL NOT HAVE SEX WITH YOU!
Oh. In that case, eternal virtual torment it is.
Those should not be the only two choices!
klik


It grieves me that we've come to this, but I must demand you return to us—
Oh, for—
GRAB!
WAP
WAP
WAP
WAP
WAP
WAP
Ow!
That all went much differently in my head.
EXIT
STOMP
STOMP
STOMP

Gavotte, did you know who Ira was?
Naturally.
The old humbug hired me to look after your species' discarded toys, thinking I'd care more for order than for them.
And you didn't tell anyone?
Why, that wouldn't have gotten you to the place you need to be.
In the woods at night with no shoes and a loose brain?
Smashing, isn't it?

Sometimes being a hero is just dull, huh?
Oh yes.
So is everyone on the bus reality blind, or—?
No, we're more or less normal for the Greyhound.

I've rigged a life—support system from a coffee carafe, but we'll need a more stable solution.
Oh, Nick.. I'm so sorry. I've done terrible things, and you've always stood by me.
I want to be a better person. A braver person. Someone who deserves your friendship.
Someone who doesn't steal Happy Meal toys from a brain in a box?
He got a really good Spider-Man!

YAAAAAUGH!!
Switching the labels on Helen's serums, shooting off her ray guns, stowing away on her mad expeditions why do I do these things?
AAAAAUGH!
Its hardly logical, is it? Yet my artificially-enhanced intellect, fomenting in this isolated lab, grows so hungry for new diversions.
GAH!
The truth may be that, much as I like to consider myself the token sane member of this group, I'm as loosely hinged as my human collegues..
WHY ARE YOU THE ONE HAVING THE IDENTITY CRISIS??
Well, except for Mell. Let's not go overboard.

There are good mad scientists, aren't there?
Oh, yes. They're less common than the evil kind.
They're very special people, using their rare gifts benevolently, their genius illuminated by a childlike sense of whimsy and wonder.
Hurry, Jimmy! If we activate the Fantibulous Space-Time Ossifier, we can help write the Declaration of Independence!
Oh, boy, Dr. K!
You just want to skewer them on a meathook, don't you?
And their creepy little sidekicks, too.

Honestly, the abuse I suffer for being the good one...
"The good one"?
You're responsible for the creation of these wretched rodents! You funded this flying doomsday device!
Dave wouldn't even be here if you hadn't made me let him go! You wreak more evil than any of us!
Yes, but I recycle!
C'mon, let's move before you drop a nuke on us or something.

FINALLY, THIS FEATURE DARES ASK THE QUESTION: WHO WOULD WIN IN A FIGHT BETWEEN A GIANT ROBOT FOOT ACCOMPANIED BY A RIFLE-TOTING ASSASSIN AND AN ARMY OF HAMSTERS IN MECHANICAL SUITS?
YEE-HAW!
budda budda
BAILOUT! BAILOUT!
STOMP
ANSWER: THE CARTOONIST.
Yaaay!
That's just weird.

The Snack of Destruction is Prepared for You
TOOLBOX
The U.S government wants joy and magic

PLEASE!
YOU'VE GOT TO LET ME USE THIS MPR! "BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER" IS ON!
BUZZ OFF, GEEK. THEY'RE WATCHING BUFFY OVER IN RAYMOND.
YOU THINK I DON'T KNOW THAT? MY EX-GIRLFRIEND LIVES IN RAYMOND! SHE'LL BE THERE! I CAN'T SHOW UP IN OUR OLD JOINT TERRITORY!!
NO, I CEDE HER POSSESSION OF PRIME BUFFY-WATCHING SPACE, AND CONSIGN MYSELF TO THE HINTERLANDS... IF ONLY SHE KNEW THE PAIN...
BUT I CAN'T WATCH IT IN RAYMOND! MY EX-BOYFRIEND'LL BE THERE! HE'S A BUFFY FANATIC!
DOESN'T THE NSO HAVE A PLACE FOR PEOPLE LIKE YOU?

Skin Horse by Shannon K. Garrity & Jeffrey C. Wells
www.skin-horse.com

WHEN A BRAVE SELFLESS DOG
BOTTOM TEXT